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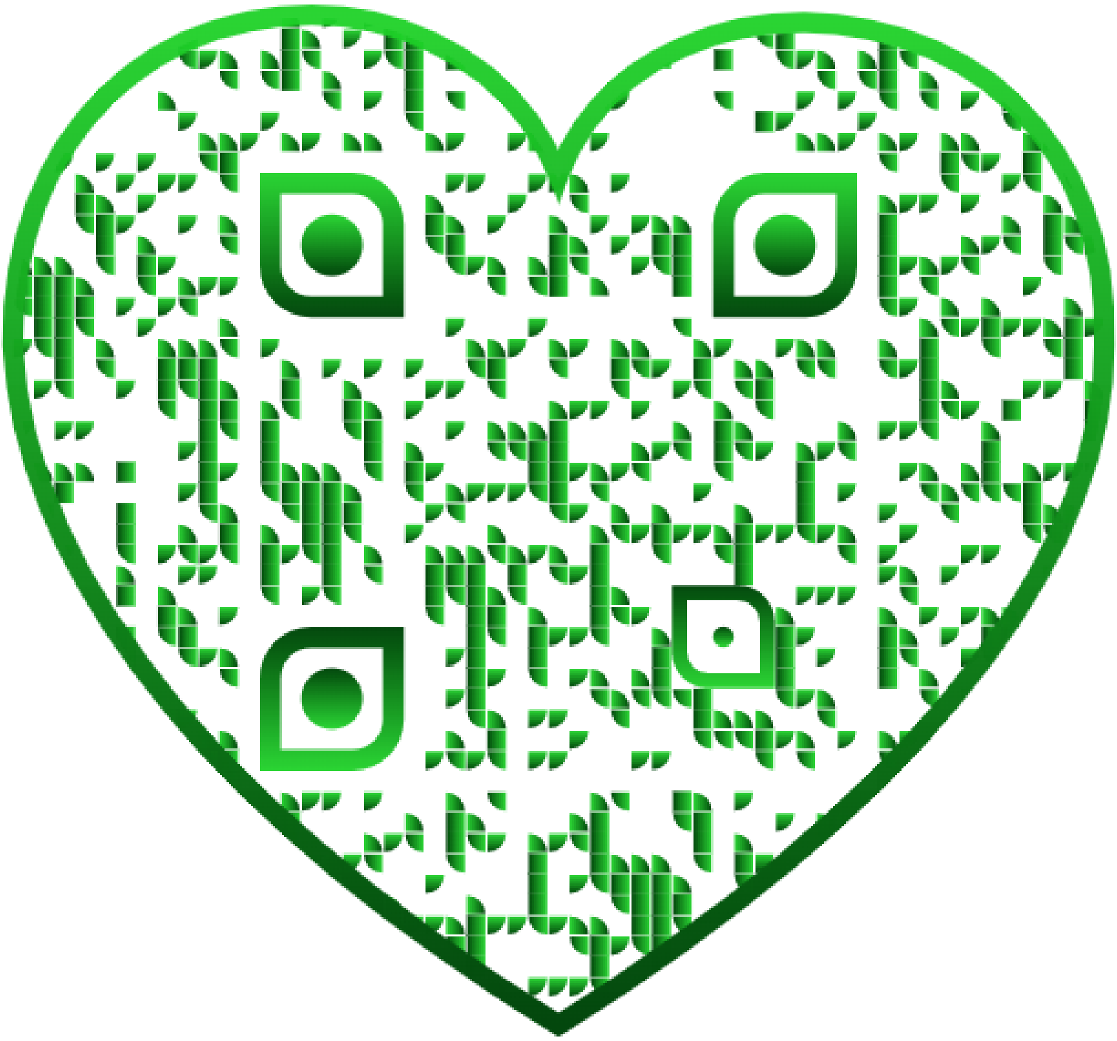
15 excerpts that have taken on a life of their own

How looming death haunted Schubert's final works



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Tel: +44 (0)117 927 9009
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Welcome

'It absolutely reeks of cow-pies, exaggerated Norwegian nationalism and trollish self-satisfaction! But I have a hunch that the irony will be discernible,' wrote Edvard Grieg to his friend Frants Beyer in 1874. The music in question? His own 'In the Hall of the Mountain King' from *Peer Gynt*. Whether or not audiences appreciated that irony, there can be little doubt the composer was on to a winner – 150 years later, his incidental accompaniment to Henrik Ibsen's nationalistic play remains some of the most recognisable music ever composed, heard everywhere from adverts to pop covers.

And Grieg *was* a magnificent melodist – witness the bravura opening to his much-loved Piano Concerto, performed by the wonderful Paul Lewis on our Cover CD, or the lush nostalgia of the accompanying *Holberg Suite*. On page 24, Terry Blain tells the story of *Peer Gynt*'s composition, and analyses its musical themes and impact.

Another master of melody was Sergei Rachmaninov – for years dismissed as too lyrical and populist to be taken seriously, but today appreciated for his romantic genius. In perhaps no other work are these qualities more apparent than the Second Piano Concerto, which he began composing 125 years ago. Still as fresh and vivid today as at its premiere in 1901, the work is the subject of this month's *Building a Library* by Jessica Duchen on page 68.

Charlotte Smith

Charlotte Smith *Editor*

THIS MONTH'S CONTRIBUTORS

Terry Blain
Music journalist

'Grieg's *Peer Gynt* contains some very familiar music. But how many know the Ibsen play for which it was written? The Grieg-Ibsen collaboration was not always smooth, but ultimately proved immensely fruitful.' ***Page 24***

Clifford Hall
Writer, composer and performer

'It all began with an offhand remark from a classical DJ about Haydn's one-night fortune. That chance comment drew me into 18th-century diaries and reviews – and into the dazzling world of his London Symphonies.' ***Page 36***

Jessica Duchen
Author and journalist

'It would be easy to think of Rachmaninov's Second Piano Concerto as a guilty pleasure. But I love it to bits, even after dozens of listens for this month's *Building a Library* feature. Whose do I choose?.' ***Page 68***

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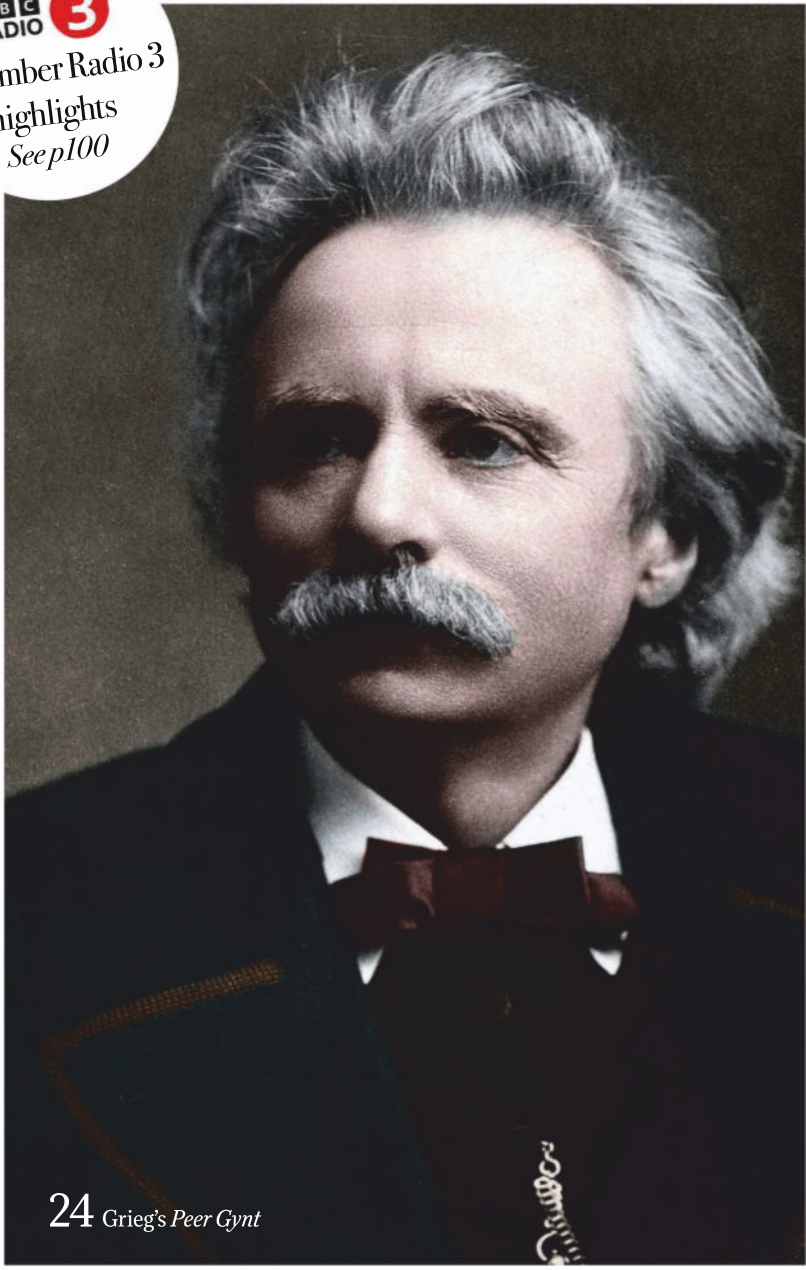
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Rebecca Janyshiwskyj
+44 (0)117 300 8547
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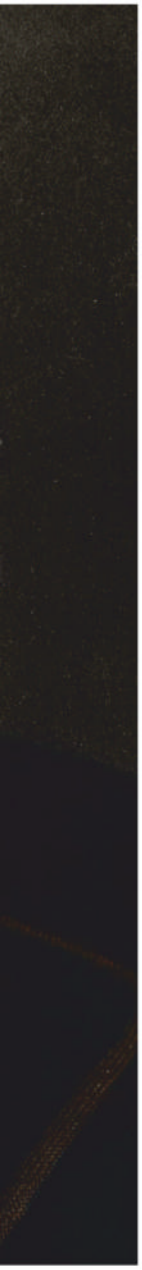

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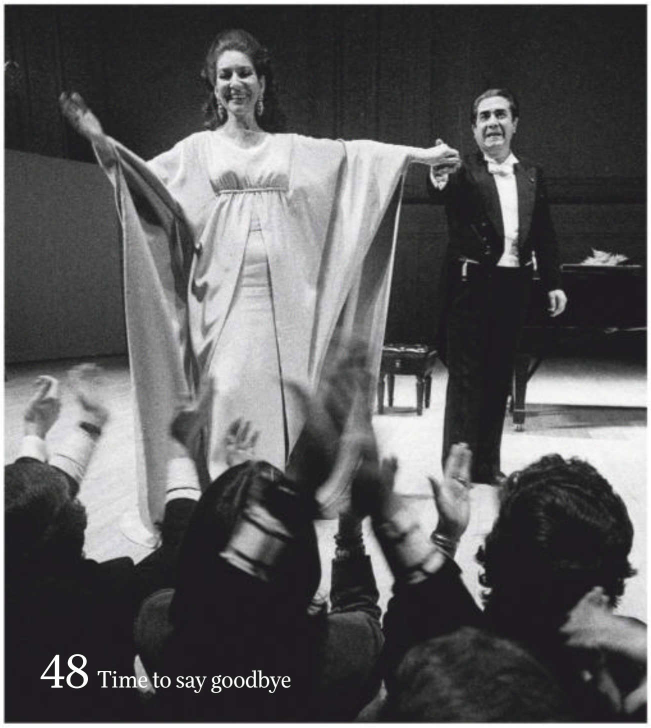

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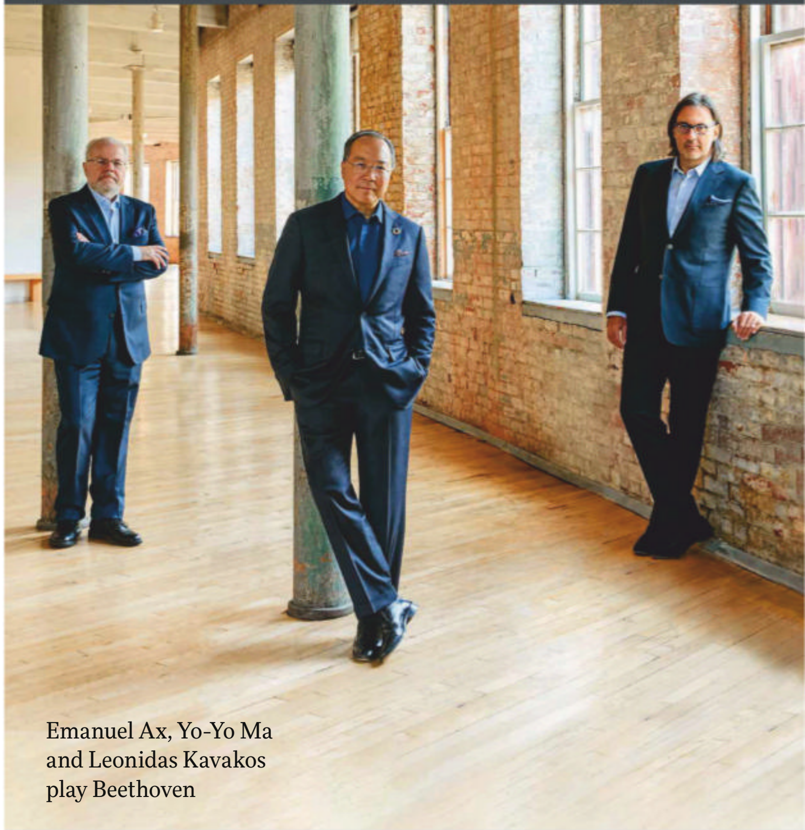
December reviews

Your guide to the best new recordings and books



Emanuel Ax, Yo-Yo Ma and Leonidas Kavakos play Beethoven

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Beethoven for Three
Works for Piano Trio

'It's clear that even after more than a decade performing together as a trio, they still relish each other's playing'

---

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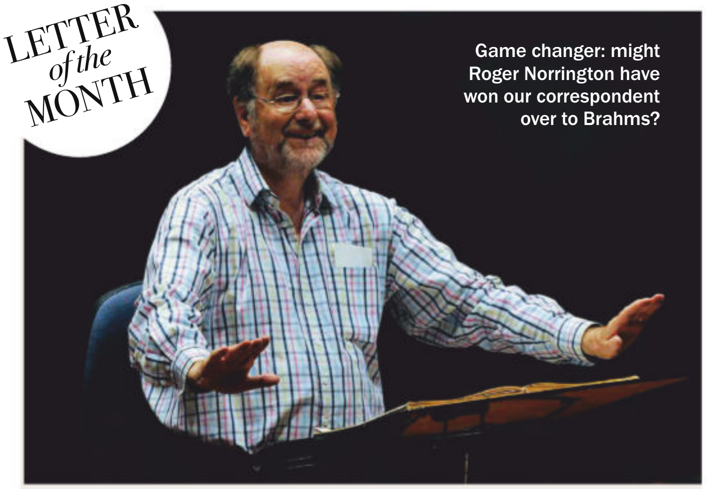
LETTER of the MONTH



Game changer: might Roger Norrington have won our correspondent over to Brahms?

GETTY

The elusive charms of Brahms

Claire Jackson's opinions on Brahms (*Hero or Hype?*; August) resonated with me. I studied his First Symphony for O-Level, and his Fourth for A-Level. Then at college, my piano teacher insisted I learn some Brahms pieces. On saying that I didn't like Brahms, he replied, 'When you grow up, you will like him'. I am delighted that, at the age of 77, I have not yet 'grown up'! However, reading your October tribute to the late Roger Norrington, of whom I was a great admirer, made me think. He conducted a series of the complete Beethoven symphonies on the TV with his period orchestra, which changed my attitude to those symphonies. I do wonder whether my dislike of Brahms has stemmed from repeated listenings to his symphonies as a teenager – my records were by 1950s/60s orchestras, conducted by Otto Klemperer (and others), whose modern instruments, very slow tempos and with heavy vibrato I found stodgy and boring. Maybe if I'd heard Norrington conducting Brahms, I'd have changed my mind about his music!

***Nell Gregory,** Dorset*

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Soothing Elgar

Your *Rays of light* feature (November) struck a chord, not least because I could identify with some of the contributors who mentioned having been through dark times in relation to their parents. I lost my own parents within three months of each other in early 2023, preceded by months of seemingly endless hospital admissions, worries over their day-to-day care and a major shift in our relationship as a result. It was a hellish time for all concerned. But music helps, and for me it is Elgar's *Sospiri* that provides the balm. It was played at my Dad's funeral and although it still hurts to hear it, it now also soothes. Where we would be without the gift of beautiful music, heaven knows.

***David Moore,** via email*

The editor replies:
We agree entirely! And further suggesitons of works readers turn to in troubled times are more than welcome…

Changing times

I enjoyed Richard Morrison's October column referring to performing styles from former days and to Historically Informed Performance (HIP). My view is that classical music is often written in one context and performed in another. All music practice, in other words, is historically informed. Rather than dismiss as dated the discography of the likes of Klemperer, Ormandy (two of my favourites) and others, it is worth considering matters such as the rising popularity of classical music leading to bigger halls, the lack of amplification leading to larger orchestras and much besides – when considering how these influenced and shaped home listening, it becomes easier to understand the evolution of performance styles which predate what we refer to as HIP. Context is everything. I loved Roger Norrington's Beethoven, and while HIP is not really my cup of tea, I am in awe of the ambition and slaying of giants which HIP practitioners have brought to music and how they have enthused a generation of musicians and composers, and brought life to our beloved classical music world which was, to be honest, atrophying. However, to dismiss the legacy of performance of the earlier 20th century without considering its context is surely as misplaced as dismissing silent films because of their lack of dialogue, or *Citizen Kane* because it was filmed in monochrome.

***Peter Caffrey,** Dublin, Ireland*

Top trumpets

It was good to read Matilda Lloyd's choice of trumpet heroes (*Top brass*; October) and nice that they extended to a couple of jazz giants, Louis Armstrong and Miles Davis. There are a couple of other major trumpeters in other

traditions worth hearing. First, the Lebanese-born trumpeter Ibrahim Maalouf, who plays the quarter-tone trumpet (invented by his father, a pupil of Maurice André) – it's great for Arabic music – and who played this summer at the BBC Proms. And then the larger-than-life Boban Marković, a Roma Gypsy musician, and king of the Serbian trumpet who has won dozens of prizes at the huge Guča Trumpet Festival. Both play liquid gold.
***Simon Broughton,** London*

Bach and Bergman

I enjoyed your article on the best uses of classical music in film (*Picture Perfect*; September) and all the selections were good, some even inspired. However, as a professional musician for more than 50 years who has played on more than 75 film scores and worked with composers like Ennio Morricone, Elmer Bernstein, James Horner, Carter Burwell, Danny Elfman and many others, to me there is no more powerful or profound pairing of music and film than Ingmar Bergman's use of the Sarabande from JS Bach's Cello Suite No. 5 in *Cries and Whispers*. While it might be a little more esoteric than your choices, it is still mainstream enough to be high, if not at the very top of the list.
***Ronnie Bauch,** violinist, Orpheus Chamber Orchestra*

A matter of taste

With regard to your *Hero or Hype?* feature , in the 1960s the magazine *High Fidelity* asked its writers to list ten composers they hated. By far the most prevalent name was Reger, which I found odd as he was hardly a household name. CPE Bach was also a common choice. My five nominees are all international headliners, led by Debussy. The only opera I can recall walking out on was *Pelléas and Mélisande* at the Met, and I hope I never have to sit through *La mer* again. I would also include the too scholarly and serious JS Bach, the tinkle-tinkle Chopin, Puccini's vocal hysteria and Britten's dull attempts at populist modernism. On the other hand, I love Berlioz, Brahms and Mendelssohn and can cope with Wagner (all in your feature). I enjoy some of each composer's works and dislike some music by many of my favourites. It's all personal taste.
***Jay Donner,** Philadelphia, US*

In search of peace

Good coffee brings good cheer with the prospect of good conversation. Subtle music may calm the atmosphere, though I wonder if any composers wrote their music to that end! Yet as someone who appreciates an enclosing ambience, I often find the intrusive throb of the speakers is a block to a warm encounter, or a block to my own contemplative thoughts. Do any of your readers find the same, or know of others who suffer? Might it be possible to compile a small book of quiet cafes? Or in a more creative sense, seek out musicians who might write and perform music for their local coffee houses?
***Hugh Allen,** Wiveliscombe*

The editor replies:
Some of our longer-term readers may well remember composer Peter Maxwell Davies sparking a debate on this subject several years ago, when he complained about the loudness of music being played in restaurants. We would love to hear further opinions on the subject.

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An epic journey
When asked to write music for Ibsen's play *Peer Gynt*, Grieg thought he was facing an impossible challenge. But, as Terry Blain relates, the composer's perseverance resulted in a masterpiece of matchless character and colour
Grieg
Peer Gynt
'*Peer Gynt* is a terribly difficult play for which to write music'
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PEER GYNT

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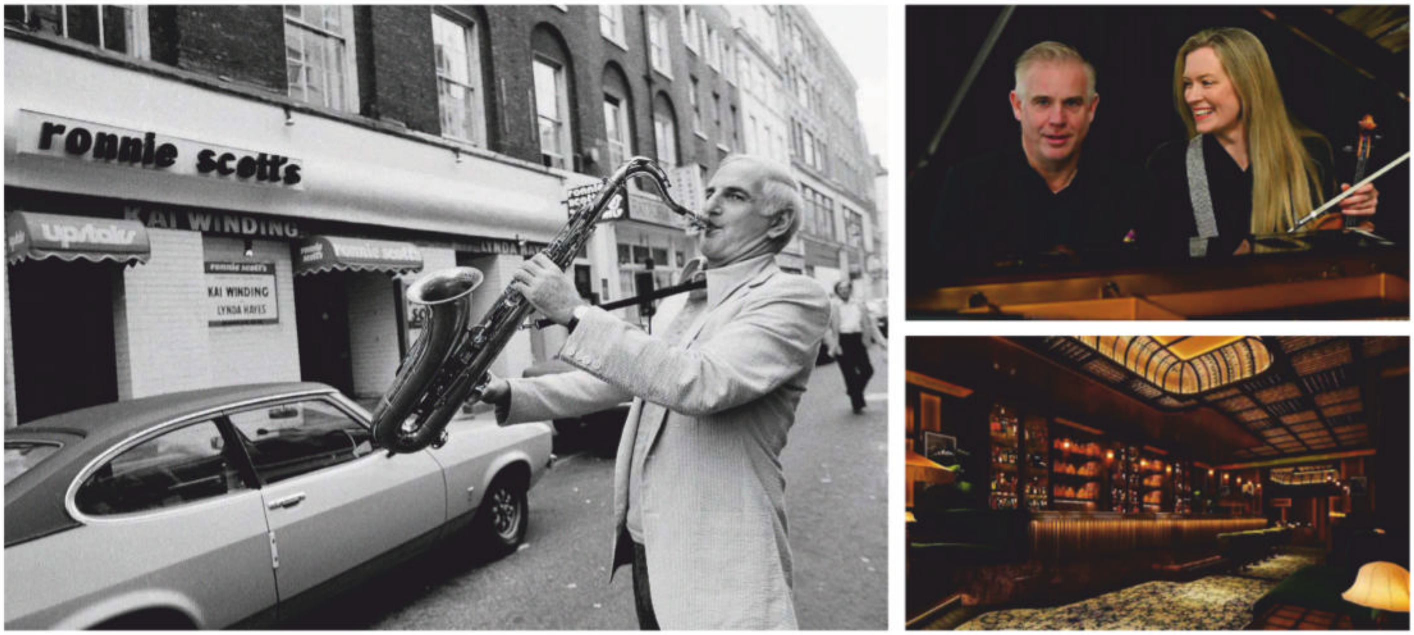


Then and now: (above left) Ronnie Scott outside his famous club in 1979; (top) pianist James Pearson and violinist Lizzie Ball, curators of the new Ronnie Scott's classical music season; (above) how the venue's revamped upstairs area is set to look

MONIKA C JAKUBOWSKA, GETTY

Ronnie Scott's takes a classical turn

New Monday night concert series to begin in February

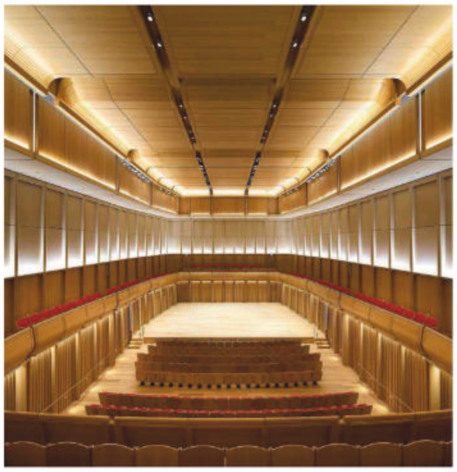
For the first time, London's iconic Ronnie Scott's Jazz Club is set to hold regular classical music concerts. Every Monday from February, Upstairs at Ronnie's will host performers ranging from the club's own Ronnie Scott's Classical All Stars to guest musicians such as Chineke! and the King's Singers in the Soho venue's new purpose-built, 140-capacity auditorium.

A seven-piece ensemble directed by pianist James Pearson and including violinist Lizzie Ball, who are co-curating the programme, Ronnie Scott's Classical All Stars will be re-imagining orchestral favourites for chamber-sized forces, with the likes of Gershwin's *Rhapsody in Blue*, Rachmaninov's Piano Concerto No. 2 and Vaughan Williams's *The Lark Ascending* among the works lined up for the debut season. Other concert strands include Ball's 'Classical Kicks', showcasing music by Piazzolla, Bartók and Gershwin, and 'Close Up Classical' evenings of music and conversation with actors, musicians and cultural figures such as actress Juliet Stevenson and composer David Arnold.

The groundbreaking move coincides with a recent redevelopment of the upstairs area at Ronnie Scott's which, the club says, will create a space 'equally suited to chamber ensembles, solo recitals and early music groups as well as cross-genre collaborations'. 'Our vision is to create a classical series that feels as alive and accessible as Ronnie's itself,' say Pearson and Ball. 'Bringing classical music into a venue best known for jazz opens it up to new audiences, and the energy of a jazz club combined with classical performance is something truly unique. We hope Ronnie would be proud of this new venture, which is very much in the spirit of the club: you never know who you'll see.'

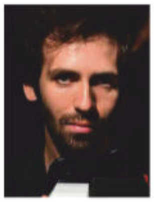
> 'Our vision is to create a classical series that feels alive and accessible'

Founded by saxophonists Ronnie Scott and Pete King in 1959, Ronnie Scott's has been at its current Frith Street location since 1965. Often with Scott himself at the helm, evenings at the club would see the house musicians joined by a regular stream of stars, many from overseas – these include Jimi Hendrix, who in 1970 made his last ever public appearance there. In 1978, the launch of the Ronnie Scott's Jazz House record label would see many of those performances captured for posterity. Scott died in 1996, at which point King continued to run the venue until it was sold to theatre impresario Sally Greene and philanthropist Michael Watt in 2005.

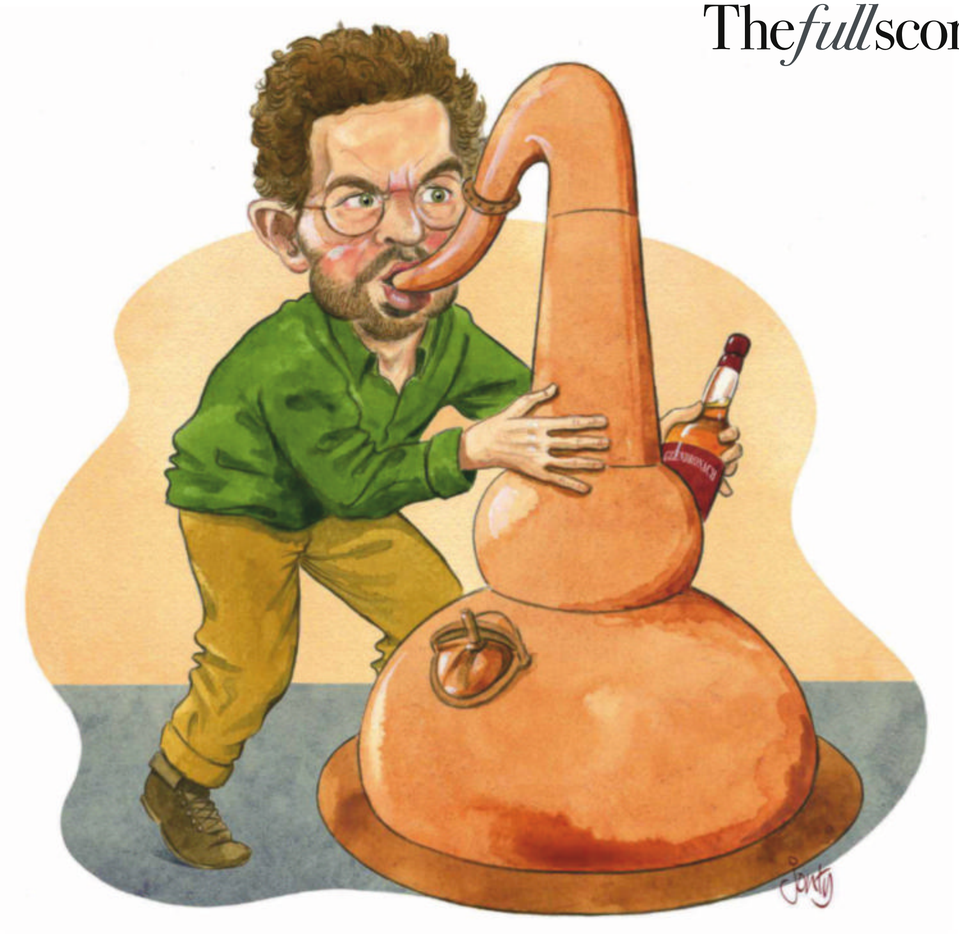


A fine place to play: Oxford's Sohmen Concert Hall

New venue set to put Oxford top of the table



Long famed for its dreaming spires and glorious choirs, Oxford now has a brand new concert venue to sing about. To mark the recent opening of its Stephen A Schwarzman Centre for the Humanities, the University of Oxford has revealed the inaugural season of concerts in the centre's 500-seat Sohmen Concert Hall, with visiting artists to include pianists Alexandre Kantorow (above) and Vikingur Ólafsson, Eric Whitacre and the BBC Singers and, kicking it all off in April, the city's own Schola Cantorum. A hub for the majority of the university's humanities subjects, the centre has been built thanks to a substantial gift by the American philanthropist after whom it is named.



Tasting notes? Composer is happy to oblige

What does whisky sound like? The Glendronach distillery in Scotland is aiming to answer just that by commissioning a new piece of music that reflects the character of its esteemed 12-year-old single malt. Chosen for the task is Emmy-nominated composer Rob Lewis, whose *Valley of the Brambles* comes with moment-by-moment listening/tasting notes to enable full appreciation of how he has represented the whisky's Spanish inflections and the distillery's rural location in his three-minute work for solo cello. Ever the professionals, we very much look forward to receiving a dram or two in the post so we can, ahem, hear it for ourselves… Sláinte!

Been around the world: Cragside's Broadwood piano, the former travelling companion of virtuoso Arabella Goddard (above)

Return of a piano wanderer

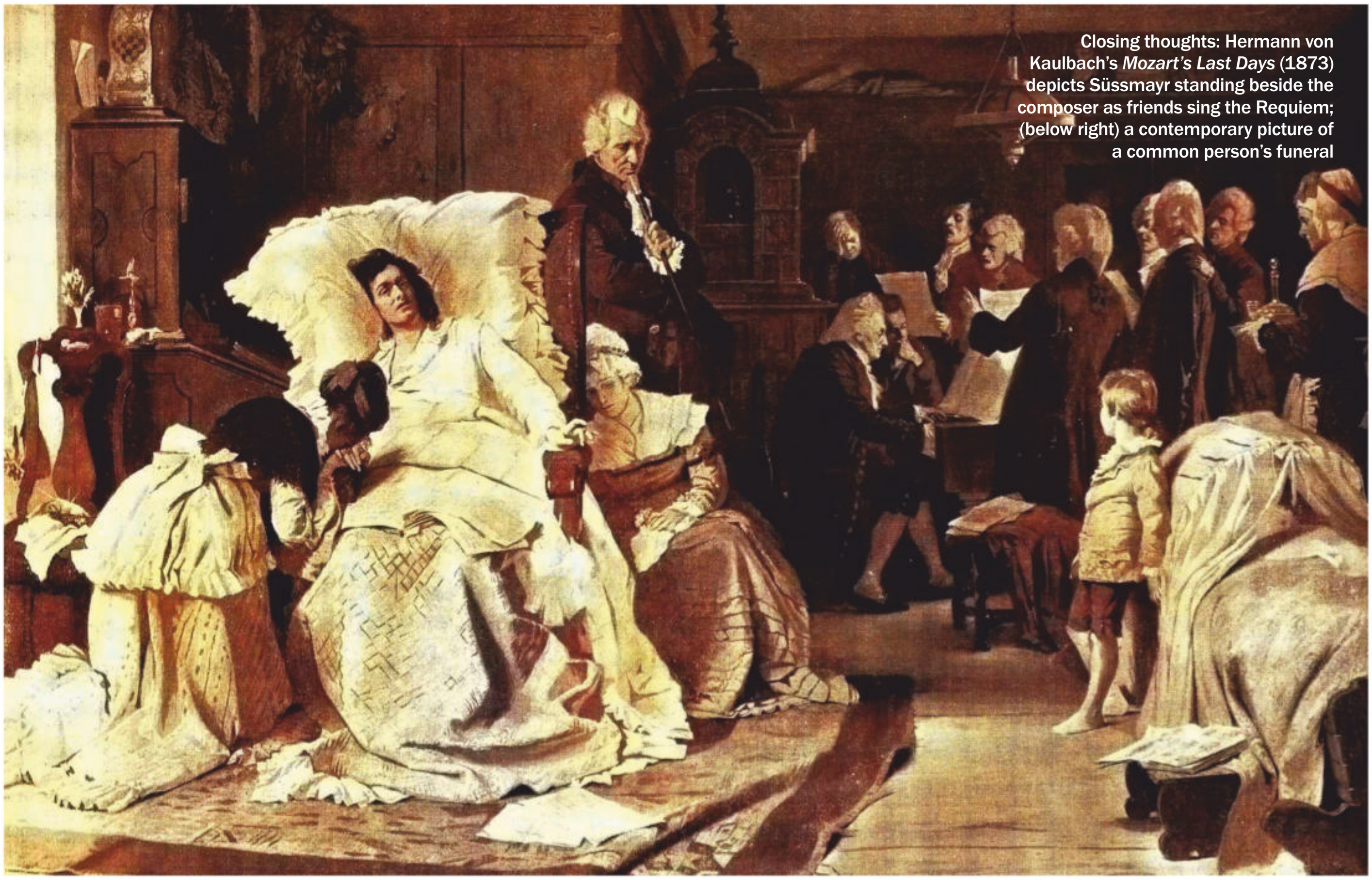
A celebrity Victorian piano with a history of wandering and adventure to match that of the Greek hero Odysseus has finally settled at home in Northumbria. As of October, visitors to the National Trust's Cragside property near Rothbury have been able to admire a Broadwood grand that was once owned by famous concert pianist Arabella Goddard and with whom it travelled all around the globe.

On one such tour, in 1874, both pianist and piano were shipwrecked off the coast of Queensland, Australia, before being rescued and making it down to Sydney. When there, Goddard's premature departure due to a scandal then led to a theatre manager holding the poor instrument hostage until negotiations were made for its release.

Though the piano's odyssey seemed to be at an end when, the next year, it returned to Britain and was installed at Cragside, by the early 20th century it had disappeared again and into the hands of a succession of private owners. But now, thanks to the generosity of its most recent purchasers, it has a permanent resting place back in Cragside's drawing room, where its rosewood curves will be there for all to admire.

NATIONAL TRUST IMAGES/ANNAPURNA MELLOR, HUFTON + CROW, SASHA GUSOV **ILLUSTRATION:** JONTY CLARK

TIMEPIECE This month in history



Closing thoughts: Hermann von Kaulbach's *Mozart's Last Days* (1873) depicts Süssmayr standing beside the composer as friends sing the Requiem; (below right) a contemporary picture of a common person's funeral

DECEMBER 1791

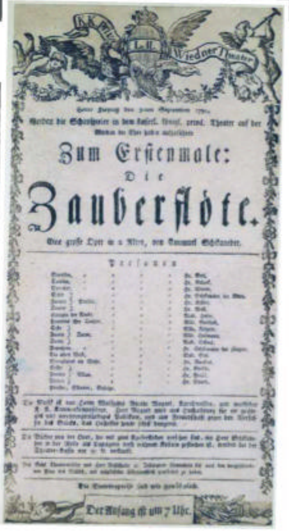
Mozart breathes his last, with his Requiem left unfinished

The summer of 1791 was an exceptionally busy period, even by Mozart's habitually hard-working standards. He was, to begin with, composing a new opera, *Die Zauberflöte* ('The Magic Flute'). Then, in June, he received a commission for a new choral work, a Requiem. By early July there were already signs that Mozart was struggling with the pressure of looming deadlines, and health issues lurking namelessly below the surface. 'There's a sort of emptiness which hurts somehow,' he wrote to his wife Constanze. 'A certain longing that is never fulfilled and therefore never stops. Not even my work gives me joy anymore.'

To cap it all, Mozart was asked to write a new opera, *La clemenza di Tito*, for the coronation of Leopold II as King of Bohemia. He accepted: it was a prestigious job, and Mozart needed all the money he could get to clear old debts and put his family - a new baby, Franz Xaver Wolfgang, arrived on 26 July – on a firmer financial footing. The bulk of *Tito* was composed in a month, and at the end of August Mozart travelled to Prague (a four-day journey) for rehearsals and the premiere.

By now, though, the strain was openly telling. To those who saw him he seemed unwell, and he was consulting doctors. *Tito* premiered on 6 September, to a lukewarm reception. A little over three weeks later, Mozart directed the first performance of *Die Zauberflöte* in Vienna. It was sensationally successful, and began an extended run at the theatre. Mozart was now earning more money than at any other period in his life. Surely he had earned a period of rest and recuperation, and would now take it?

This never happened. Instead he forged ahead, completing the serene Clarinet Concerto for his close friend Anton Stadler in October. He then began composing the Requiem in earnest, but quickly developed a notion that the work was somehow intertwining with the symptoms of ill health that he was feeling. 'I know I must die,' he told Constanze, wondering if he had possibly been poisoned. A sense of fatalism periodically surfaced, exacerbated by physical and mental exhaustion. The Requiem, Mozart mused darkly, was now being written 'for myself'.


K.K. priv.
L.H.
Wiedner Theater
Zum Erſtenmale:
Die
Zauberflöte.
Der Anfang iſt um 7 Uhr.

Operatic farewell: (above) the theatre in Prague where *La clemenza di Tito* was premiered, 1791; (above right) a poster for the premiere of *Die Zauberflöte* in Vienna

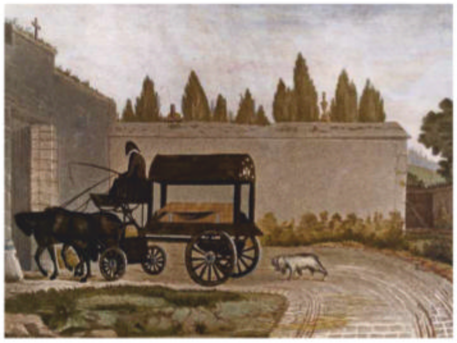
On 20 November Mozart's health finally broke, and he became bedridden. Swelling in his hands and feet, an inability to move and vomiting were among the reported symptoms. A steady stream of visitors came to his flat in Vienna's Rauhensteingasse. Some recalled him singing through sections of the unfinished Requiem with family and friends, and jotting notes for its completion. The medical attention he received – including blood-draws, purgatives and emetics – was largely ineffective and weakened him further. His body swelled up, and 'internal disintegration' caused a stench so bad it later rendered an autopsy impossible.

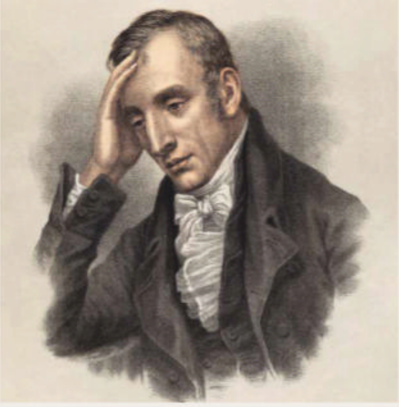
'I know I must die,' he told Constanze, wondering if he had been poisoned

Fifteen days after becoming bedridden, Mozart died, at 12.55am on Monday 5 December. He was 35 years old. A day later, his coffin was taken to St Stephen's Cathedral for a religious ceremony. It was then driven by a two-horse cart to the St Marx Cemetery, three miles away in the village of Landstrasse. There, Mozart was buried in an unmarked plot purchased from the city authorities. It was the cheapest type of funeral available (Constanze had an uncertain financial future ahead of her) but not the communal pauper's grave of Mozartian legend.

Another legend flourished in the decades following Mozart's death - that he had indeed been poisoned, by the Italian composer Antonio Salieri. There is no evidence for this, although the two were keen professional rivals. The myth, though, was perpetuated in the modern era by Peter Shaffer's 1979 play *Amadeus*, and the subsequent movie, both of which mixed broad historical fact with episodes of blatant fiction. Towards the end of Mozart's life, the pair were actually friends together: when Salieri was taken by Mozart to see *Die Zauberflöte*, 'there was not a single number that did not elicit from him a "bravo" or "bello"'.

But if Salieri did not kill Mozart, what did? To this day the answer to that question is uncertain: there is simply too little medical evidence to make a solid diagnosis. Dozens of possible causes of death have been posited, including rheumatic fever, streptococcal infection and renal failure. Constanze, however, had a simpler view of what had happened to her husband: overwork. 'That opened the door to illness of a kind he had survived before,' writes Mozart biographer Jan Swafford, 'but no longer had the strength to.' ***Terry Blain***





French exchange: poet William Wordsworth

Also in December 1791...

4th: The inaugural edition of the **Observer**, the UK's first Sunday newspaper, is published. Promising 'Truth, and the Dissemination of every Species of Knowledge that may conduce to the Happiness of Society', the four-page first issue covers subjects such as sending convicts to Australia, crop farming and a West Country gentleman's encounters with 'chicken prostitutes' near Somerset House.

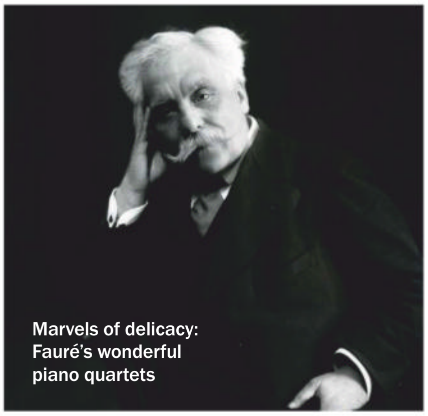
6th: Following a brief stay in Paris after crossing the English Channel in late-November, **William Wordsworth** arrives in Orléans, France. The 21-year-old poet is there ostensibly to improve his command of French, though he is also drawn there by his fascination with the Revolution and a desire to get away from his guardians. In Orléans, he meets Marie Anne Vallon, who soon becomes pregnant with his child.

15th: The US **Bill of Rights** is ratified when Virginia becomes the final state to give its approval. Of 17 amendments to the Constitution initially proposed by the House of Representatives, 12 were then approved by the Senate in 1789. Of those 12, ten – including the rights to freedom of speech and to bear arms – are now passed into US law.

23rd: With religious services and secular concerts banned by the Revolution, the Austrian composer (and later publisher and piano manufacturer) **Ignaz Pleyel** leaves France for London, where he has been invited to run a concert series. Though the enterprise is a rival to that run by his former teacher Haydn, the two remain friends (see page 36).

29th (Julian calendar): Delegates from Russia and the Ottoman Empire sign the **Treaty of Jassy**, bringing to an end the Russian-Turkish War that has been raging since 1787. Made inevitable by the Russians' storming of the fortress of Izmail the previous year, the treaty sees the Ottoman Empire cede significant territory near the Black Sea.

Music to my ears


Marvels of delicacy: Fauré's wonderful piano quartets

The *BBC Music Magazine* team's current favourites...

Charlotte Smith *Editor*
While visiting my hometown of Adelaide, Australia, I attended the **10th Anniversary Gala for Ukaria**, a beautiful chamber venue with floor-to-ceiling windows overlooking the hills of Mount Barker. Joining the Australian String Quartet and musicians from the Australian Chamber Orchestra – performing on fine Italian instruments loaned by Ukaria – was violinist Pekka Kuusisto, who curated an eclectic programme of works, ranging from Maddalena Sirmen to Missy Mazzoli and Olli Mustonen.

Jeremy Pound *Deputy editor*
Ever since I wrote a small piece questioning the genius of **Britten** in our August issue, hearing a string of pieces of his on Radio 3 has had me starting to doubt my verdict. His 1940 *Sinfonia da Requiem* for orchestra is a case in point. After a disquieting Lacrymosa and ferocious, Shostakovich-like Dies Irae comes the crowning moment: a slow-treading Requiem Aeternam that, moving between the serene and the sinister, leaves the subjects of death and the afterlife as enigmatic as ever. It is quite brilliant.

Steve Wright *Content producer*
Lately, I've been absorbed by **Fauré**'s two Piano Quartets. The First is a marvel of delicacy and elegance; its flowing melodies and light, airy textures feel almost conversational. The Second is darker, more introspective, with moments of surprising intensity and passion. Haunting, and utterly absorbing. Across both works, I'm struck by Fauré's subtlety and economy – he never overstates, yet every note carries resonance.

Miranda Bardsley *Reviews editor*
As the title suggests, **Satie**'s *Pièces Froides* make the perfect accompaniment to the changing of the season. Unpublished until 1912, these two sets of piano pieces – written in barless notation without time or key signatures – beautifully capture the quiet isolation that the cold weather brings. Whenever I listen, I always picture Santiago Rusiñol's 1891 painting of Satie by the fire in his room in Montmartre.

Bridging the divide: Alexander Shelley believes in music's unifying power

Concert Heaven
Concert Hell

Top artists recall their best and worst performances

THIS MONTH
Alexander Shelley *conductor*

CONCERT HEAVEN

Zosha Di Castri, Jocelyn Morlock, Nicole Lizée, John Estacio
Life Reflected
National Arts Centre Orchestra
Eskasoni, Cape Breton Nation (May 2017)
This concert was during one of my early seasons with Canada's National Arts Centre Orchestra. We had created a series of works to celebrate the 150th anniversary of the confederation of the country, called *Life Reflected*. There were four interdisciplinary commissions which charted the stories of four different women, but together they created a whole: an autobiography by the great Canadian author Alice Monroe; Roberta Bondar, Canada's first female astronaut; Amanda Todd, a young girl who was cyber-bullied and committed suicide; and a poem by a woman called Rita Joe called 'I Lost My Talk'. Rita was a Mi'kmaq poet and wrote about her experience at a 'Residential School' where the Indigenous Indian population were Westernised, forced to learn English and not allowed to speak their own languages. This beautiful, conciliatory, warm poem ends with the words: 'Let me find my talk, so I can tell you about me'. She wanted to find her language so she could share her identity. We partnered with her community and built a relationship with a place called Eskasoni in Cape Breton, where she grew up, and we had an Indigenous actress who was part of it, too. It was beautiful.

Then, about a year later when we were on tour, we went to Eskasoni. The night before the concert the residents threw this huge party for the orchestra; they

Podium power: Shelley conducting and (below) Rita Joe, whose poem the NAC Orchestra brought to musical life

performed and cooked for us, and were so warm hearted. The next day, the ice hockey arena, which is the central plank of their community, was drained of ice, filled with hundreds of seats and we performed this piece for the community. We were the first symphony orchestra to perform on an Indian reservation.

For a guy who grew up in London and went to college in Germany, to be on an Indigenous reservation and to be with this community who'd never heard a symphony orchestra was one of the most memorable experiences of my life. It was one of those moments where you hope that the nonlingual bridge of music can communicate, and it did. We also played Dvořák's 'New World' Symphony and they loved it. It was electric.

CONCERT HELL

Britten War Requiem, Op. 66

Canadian Arts Centre Orchestra, National Youth Orchestra of Germany *(November 2018)*

This story is still something I laugh about a lot. As a conductor I've been fortunate to have a long relationship with Germany's National Youth Orchestra, and I invited them to sit side-by-side with the NAC Orchestra for a performance of Britten's *War Requiem* to mark the 100th anniversary of the end of World War I. It was so meaningful to have them all sitting together.

On 25 August of that year, my son Sasha had been born, so at this point he was about three months old. I was at home in Ottawa before the concert, and I was in the bath with him. It was just before 7pm, and our concerts always begin at 8pm. But then my wife Zoe came in, saying, 'You're getting a lot of phone calls, Alex… it's Daphne,' our manager of artistic planning. I thought maybe one of the soloists was ill. So, I got out of the bath, towelled down, and it was now about five minutes to seven.

On the phone, Daphne said, 'Are you coming? It's starting in five minutes.' I said, 'No, no, no, it's seven!' and Daphne told me they'd moved the concert earlier that night. I said, 'We've never, in my entire time here, moved anything earlier. Why now?!' She said she didn't have time to explain; they just needed me there.

Fortunately, I lived two minutes from the stage door by car. So, I threw on my suit, ran downstairs and someone had driven up by the time I got there. I jumped in the car, went right to the stage door, ran down the hallway, someone passed me my baton, the score was already on the stand and I went straight on stage. It was 7.02pm, and no one knew anything about it!

It's not like the *War Requiem* is a piece you perform every day. It's huge and with many working parts, so getting the wrong time for a concert really is every musician's idea of hell! I remember thinking, 'This isn't too bad,' but maybe the first few bars were awful!

Pairing Strauss tone poems and newly commissioned works, Alexander Shelley and the NAC's Orchestra 'Poema 2: Terra Nova' is out on 14 November on Analekta

GEORGE PAUL, CURTIS PERRY, GREGGORY CLARK, SIM CANETTY-CLARKE, GETTY

A brilliant human being: composer Judith Weir

MyHero

Soprano ***Rebecca Lea*** explains how composer ***Judith Weir*** has been a major inspiration both on and off the stage

When I was studying as a soprano at music college, I was pointed in the direction of Judith Weir's *King Harald's Saga*. I listened to a recording of it, loved it and would go on to sing it – and when I left the recording going, it then moved on to a choral work of hers called *Missa del Cid*. I was totally blown away – the singers sang in such an exciting way, with textures that wove in and out of each other to create this amazing soundworld that I'd never heard before.

After I'd finished as a student, I took part in a staged performance of *Missa del Cid* in Manchester and we sent Judith an email out of the blue, just to let her know we'd be doing it… and she came! Since then I've had what I'd say is a gentle correspondence with her, plus interactions with her professionally over the years, not least as I am a member of the BBC Singers – she was associate composer of the group for a few years and we had a chance to record quite a lot of her choral music.

I have always found Judith's music so fascinating, with the range of all those different styles that she takes on. She can embrace playfulness within her music yet can also come out with a choral work like *Illuminare, Jerusalem* that is spine-tinglingly haunting, and she also writes music that is incredibly accessible yet still serious. Plus, in addition to all that is how she takes an interest in musicians at all stages, and always behaves with such dignity and humility towards everyone. She is just an all-round brilliant human being!

Rebecca Lea's 'The New Winter Songbook', a recording of 21 new songs by contemporary composers, is out on Convivium Records on 7 November

THE LISTENING SERVICE

Make it up as you go along...

In many instances, slavishly following every note on a musical score is contrary to what its composer would have wanted or expected, as **Tom Service** explains

ILLUSTRATION: MARIA CORTE MAIDAGAN

Classical music has a problem with perfection. You'd have thought the most important job of any professional musician was learning, playing and repeating the notes composers wrote down so often that they become second nature. Surely that's how the tradition works: keep playing the same music – by Strozzi, Bach or Vivaldi – over and over again until the jewels that they left us are polished to a gleaming finish. That's what the works of classical music are all about: they are bound in the pages of scores, fixed as absolute sequences of pitches in time, and turned into objects of contemplation in performance by classical music's ideals of recreative execution.

Well... for nearly all the music written down before c.1820, that's a model of musical culture that's anachronistic, ossifying and just plain wrong. The notes that composers from Monteverdi to Mozart left us aren't absolute, but conditional. Many of their scores are deliberately incomplete, designed to be finished in the moment of performance by the musicians themselves. Those aren't extra or optional requirements; they are demanded as part of the process of making music. Instead of relying upon players and singers merely to realise what's on the page, these repertoires are about asking them to be part of the creative work itself. If you don't add your own ornamentation, embellishment and straight-up composition in moments like the cadenzas in Mozart's piano concertos, you'd end up with a performance of an incomplete homunculus he wouldn't recognise as the piece he conceived.

Instead, the continuo bands of Baroque music, the improvising brilliance of musicians from Bach to Chopin and beyond, and the idea of the score not as a series of commandments but suggestions to be interpreted and remade in the moment: all of those realities of how musical culture used to work don't resemble the perfectionist parody of classical music as it's often practised today. They're far more like the cultures of today's jazz.

Many scores are deliberately incomplete, designed to be finished in performance

The jazz composer and pianist Julian Joseph explained his philosophy when he played for us in the *Saturday Morning* studio: every time he improvises, he's connecting with and renewing a tradition, but it's a culture that's made through innovation and creativity. The jazz tradition lives when it's making sounds that are indebted to the models and players of the past, but most profoundly when it's re-inventing itself in every improvised phrase of Julian's playing. That's a relationship with text and tradition that Beethoven and Mozart would recognise far more than classical music's perfection fetish.

As Mahler said, 'Tradition isn't the worship of ashes, but the preservation of fire.' To do that, classical musicians need to get freer, more creative, more improvisatory and more curious.

BBC RADIO 3

Tom Service plays the best music to start your weekend in *Saturday Morning* at 9am

FAREWELL TO…

Time to reflect: (left) organist and conductor Martin Neary at the Royal Albert Hall console, 2004; (below) Patricia Routledge in *Little Mary Sunshine* at the Comedy Theatre, London, 1962

ALAMY, GETTY

Martin Neary (Born 1940)

Organist and conductor

On 31 August, Martin Neary was suddenly presented with the challenge of organising and rehearsing the music for the funeral of Diana, Princess of Wales in just six days' time, a task that required the then organist and master of choristers at Westminster Abbey to call his choristers back early from their summer holidays. The results of Neary's efforts were famously watched by an estimated global TV audience of 2.5 billion people and the haunting moment of the coffin being carried out of the Abbey to the sound of Tavener's *Song for Athene* would lead to a surge of interest in the British composer.

Neary himself was by then something of a veteran of royal occasions, having been a chorister at the Chapel Royal at St James's Palace during both the christening of Prince Charles in 1948 and the coronation of Elizabeth II in 1953. Following studies at Cambridge University, he went on to become director of music at Winchester Cathedral in 1972 before taking up his post at Westminster Abbey in 1988. Though the latter appointment ended in acrimony in 1998, at both Winchester and Westminster he was credited with expanding the choirs' repertoire and broadening their horizons via tours and recordings. His later years saw him work in both the UK and US, including as organist of St Michael and All Angels, Barnes and as chairman of the Herbert Howells Society.

Patricia Routledge (Born 1929)

Actress and singer

She'll be best remembered as the imperiously pretentious Hyacinth Bucket in the BBC TV sitcom *Keeping Up Appearances*, a role that won her fans around the world (including, apparently, the late Pope Benedict). However, Patricia Routledge also enjoyed a prestigious career on the live stage, as both an actress and singer. A fixture on Britain's theatre and musical stages from the 1950s onwards, on the other side of the Atlantic, her vocal gifts – a rich mezzo-cum-contralto, strong in both operetta and musical theatre – won her a Tony Award in 1968 for *Darling of the Day* on Broadway, and later an Olivier for Leonard Bernstein's *Candide* in 1988. Less glorious, however, was Bernstein's 1976 Broadway flop *1600 Pennsylvania Avenue*, in which Routledge debuted the role of the First Ladies.

Routledge's impressive G&S CV included the title role in *Iolanthe*

An impressive Gilbert and Sullivan CV, meanwhile, included BBC radio roles as Mad Margaret in *Ruddigore* and the title role in *Iolanthe* and, in 1980, playing opposite Kevin Kline in *The Pirates of Penzance* in Central Park, New York. As an actress, Routledge also performed in Walton's *Façade*, joined the Nash Ensemble for *Carnival of the Animals*, portrayed composer Hildegard of Bingen in a TV biopic, and toured with pianist Piers Lane in a show about piano legend Myra Hess.

Jilly Cooper (Born 1937) *Author*

When, in spring 1999, members of the classical fraternity world gathered for a launch at London's St Martin-in-the-Fields church, it was not for a new CD or even a concert series, but for a crime novel. *Score!*, the novel in question, was the multi-million author Jilly Cooper's first venture into murder mystery, focusing on the mysterious death of odious maestro Roberto Rannaldini as he was in the process of conducting a filmed version of Verdi's *Don Carlos*… all set amid the usual wealth, glamour and bedhopping that characterised Cooper's 'Rutshire' series.

Uniquely bringing classical music into the world of the bonkbuster, Cooper had, before *Score!*, also enjoyed enormous success with 1996's *Appassionata*, her novel about a female conductor striving to forge a career with a failing regional orchestra and meeting various obstacles as she does so – the book was soon accompanied by a *Music from Appassionata* CD. A passionate classical music lover and Radio 3 listener, Cooper explained that she had spent over three years researching *Appassionata*, while her characterisation in *Score!* proved so accurate that she was once accused of basing it unfairly closely on a contemporary well-known conductor… even though she had never met him.

Also remembered…

The Australian early music expert **Lionel Sawkins** *(born 1929)* was renowned as a conductor, scholar and editor of French Baroque music. In 2004, he made headlines when he successfully sued a leading British record label for copyright involving his editions of the composer Lalande.

Though primarily associated with Hamburg State Opera, the German baritone **Franz Grundheber** *(born 1937)* enjoyed acclaim at opera houses across the world, often playing the title roles in operas ranging from Mozart's *Marriage of Figaro* to Wagner's *Flying Dutchman* and Berg's *Wozzeck*.

THE MAGNIFICENT SEVEN

Pick a theme... and name your seven favourite examples

Pianist Clare Hammond selects neglected piano concertos that deserve to be performed more often

Since winning the Royal Philharmonic Society's Young Artist Award in 2016, Clare Hammond has established herself as one of Britain's most adventurous pianists. A graduate of Cambridge University and the Guildhall School of Music and Drama, she has performed at leading concert halls across Europe and is renowned for her advocacy of contemporary music and Polish repertoire. This October, she releases concertos by British composers with the BBC Symphony Orchestra under conductor George Vass on BIS.

Andrzej Panufnik Fantasia
Having initially written this as the first movement of his Piano Concerto, Panufnik decided it was too difficult. So, he removed it from the concerto with the intention of turning it into a standalone work, which he never got around to doing. Then, a couple of years ago, Boosey made a new edition. The composer's daughter Roxanna Panufnik got involved, and I gave the Polish premiere with the Poznán Philharmonic last November. It's a gripping and dynamic work. Emotionally, it feels like you have been swept up and shot out of a cannon.

Amy Beach Piano Concerto
As pianists, we have top-of-the-pops concertos that get trotted out again and again; this work deserves to be one of those. It's in the late Romantic mould, closest to the Grieg, but with elements of Brahmsian intensity and all the hallmarks of the great Romantic bravura concertos. But it's also very distinctive, with a folk element that adds an authenticity. It has a very incisive melodic style and, although I haven't had a chance to perform it yet, it sounds like it would be wonderful fun to play.

PHILIP GATWARD, GETTY

Grażyna Bacewicz Piano Concerto
I feel an affinity for music of this 20th-century period, and Bacewicz is a composer whose work I adore. This piano concerto sounds very representative of the Eastern European musical language of that time, providing a clear sense of who this composer is: vibrant, dramatic and colourful, with a harmonic style that verges on angular at times but also a sense of melodic immediacy. The third movement, for example, combines Polish folk tunes with Bacewicz's distinctive harmonic approach to create a feeling of crazed, ecstatic abandon. You get the impression the composer had a real zest for life.

Doreen Carwithen Piano Concerto
With every piece that Doreen Carwithen writes, you feel that she's in the room with you and has something exciting to say. Her Piano Concerto is no exception. While the second movement reminds me of *The Lark Ascending*, with an ornamented melodic line that floats over the harmonic backdrop, the outer movements are delineated in an energetic and dynamic way, with a very British, mid-20th-century feel. I've played this piece a few times and am always struck by its *joie de vivre*.

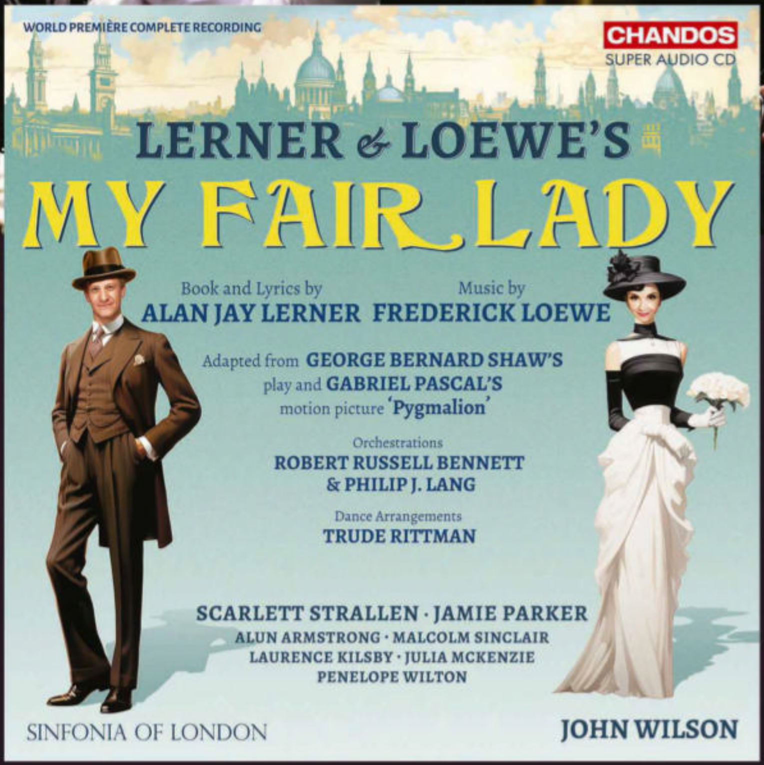
Michael Tippett Piano Concerto
From the first few seconds of listening to this piece, I was completely entranced: the opening movement unfolds with a gloriously ethereal theme that generates the sensation of being suspended in space. And that unearthly quality persists throughout the entire piece, which is filled with searching, long lines that sweep you up and carry you along; it almost feels as though you are being stretched out as the music progresses. This is an enormously complex work to fit with the orchestra, so working with the BBC Symphony Orchestra for my new recording was really exciting.

Hamilton Harty Piano Concerto
I think this piece would be a lot of fun to play. It sounds as though it was influenced by Irish folk music – especially in the third movement. But Harty's use of orchestral colour also reminds me of Tchaikovsky, characterised by that typically Russian sense of high saturation. Like several brilliant late-Romantic concertos, it completely engages the soloist on a physical level; as the pianist, you soar over these enormous textures. And for the listener, too, it's hugely enjoyable, brimming with wonderful melodies.

Luise Adolpha Le Beau Piano Concerto
We're now discovering a wealth of great music by women and composers of colour, proving that an unfamiliar name does not diminish the excellence of the work. That is certainly true of this concerto by the German composer Luise Adolpha Le Beau. In style, it is closest to Mendelssohn, with the same dramatic urgency, impassioned lyricism and mercurial lightness. But, because it's a slightly later work, it has a late-Romantic heft. I would love to see it performed more frequently; a work of this depth needs multiple interpretations to uncover all the possibilities that it holds.
Interview by Hannah Nepilova

Forgotten gems: Clare Hammond champions rarely performed concertos; (opposite) Michael Tippett; Luise Adolpha Le Beau infused her work with impassioned lyricism

CHANDOS
THE SOUND OF CLASSICAL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'Wilson combines Henry Higgins's forensic ear for detail with heart-on-sleeve love for the score…Parker gives us a younger, more volatile and infinitely more musical incarnation of the snobbish phonetician than the role's creator Rex Harrison, and there's real erotic chemistry with his protegée Eliza. Armstrong is a delight as her wily, workshy father, despatching his showstoppers with gutsy flair, wicked comic timing and a pitch-perfect Cockney accent .' *Presto Muic - Recording of the Week*

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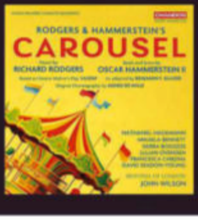
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'The cast, including Nathaniel Hackmann's petulant Billy and Mikaela Bennett's beautifully sung Julie, is first-rate, with Francesca Chiejina bringing just enough operatic weight to Nettie Fowler… it's hard to imagine this being bettered.'
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Richard Morrison

When is the right time for musicians to take their leave from the stage?

Has she gone too soon? Should she have gone at all? And won't she miss it? For once, the main talking-point at this year's Last Night of the Proms wasn't the conductor's speech or whether the EU flags outnumbered the Union Jacks. It was Alison Balsom's announcement that the concert – in which she dazzled playing pieces by Hummel and Bernstein – would be her last as a trumpet soloist. She is, it seems, retiring at 46.

When I asked her why, I received an honest answer: that the trumpet's solo repertoire is too limited and she is frankly bored with playing it. Balsom was also candid enough to admit that we would be having 'a very different conversation' if she wasn't married to a successful film director (Sir Sam Mendes) and therefore not in desperate need of another concert fee.

Even so, her decision has ignited a debate. On page 48, Andrew Green writes entertainingly about how some of history's most famous musicians made their farewells to the stage. But it's not just stars who have to know when to bow out gracefully or risk facing the humiliation of having the decision made for them. Every musician, professional or amateur, famous or obscure, eventually has to acknowledge that the passage of time has sapped the power in their fingers, or diminished their hearing, or coarsened their vocal cords, or slowed their reflexes. Or, no less tragically, drained their desire to make music at all.

And it's at this point that musical life can seem at its most unfair. Brass players, channelling enormous energy through the mouth and lips, often have shorter careers than, say, viola players. Baritones and basses, who tend to play older characters in operas, seem to go on forever, whereas sopranos are often sidelined when they don't look like Japanese geishas or Parisian consumptives any more.

And, despite attempts to reform the profession, it's still true that many wonderful women musicians are in effect forced to retire from top-class playing in their thirties and forties because the brunt of raising a family falls on them, and it's incompatible with the inflexible demands of life in an orchestra.

Put bluntly, age and experience used to be venerated much more than they are now

There's another factor at work these days, too – and that's changing attitudes towards age and experience. Put bluntly, they used to be venerated much more than they are now. Years ago, I asked Sir Simon Rattle when he thought he would reach his peak as a conductor. 'There's probably a point, somewhere around 70, when conductors start getting competent,' he replied. He was being funny (and modest) – but also reflecting what was, until quite recently, a generally held view: that conductors simply get more profound as they get older. To quote one of Stephen Sondheim's most famous songs, they seemed to be like 'dinosaurs surviving the crunch'.

Today, it appears, the people who appoint or book conductors and soloists think the opposite. The jobs are all going to whizzkids in their thirties and even twenties. The theory is that we music-lovers are crying out for new faces. That may or may not be true, but it has had a devastating impact on a whole generation. I can think of dozens of perfectly good conductors and soloists over 50 who may as well retire to nice professorships in conservatoires (if they haven't already done so) because they probably won't land another permanent conducting position in their lives.

Well, that's showbiz, I guess. In many ways I admire Balsom's decision to get out while she is still at the top, mesmerisingly virtuosic to her very last note. Far better than a slow, embarrassing decline, where first your colleagues, then your public and finally even the music critics notice that you aren't what you were.

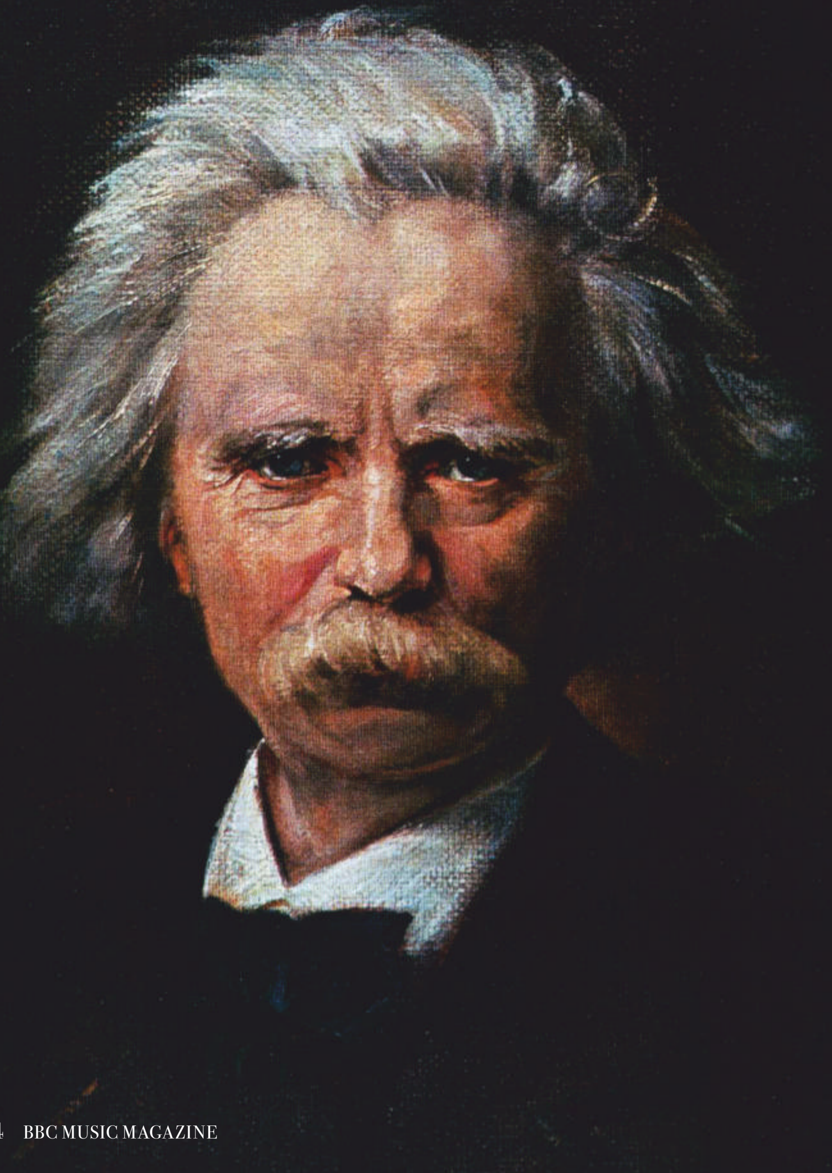
Even so, I do wonder how it is possible to voluntarily cut music-making out of your life (at least in public) when it is what has defined you and shaped you as a human being since childhood. I couldn't do that. It would be akin to spiritual death.

But perhaps the difference is that I write words for a living and make music for pleasure. I don't feel my livelihood is on the line if, like Eric Morecambe, I don't play all the notes in the right order. Which is just as well. However, if I do decide to draw my organ-playing days to a close, you can rest assured that I will not be hiring the Royal Albert Hall for a farewell recital.

Richard Morrison is chief music critic and a columnist of The Times

An epic journey

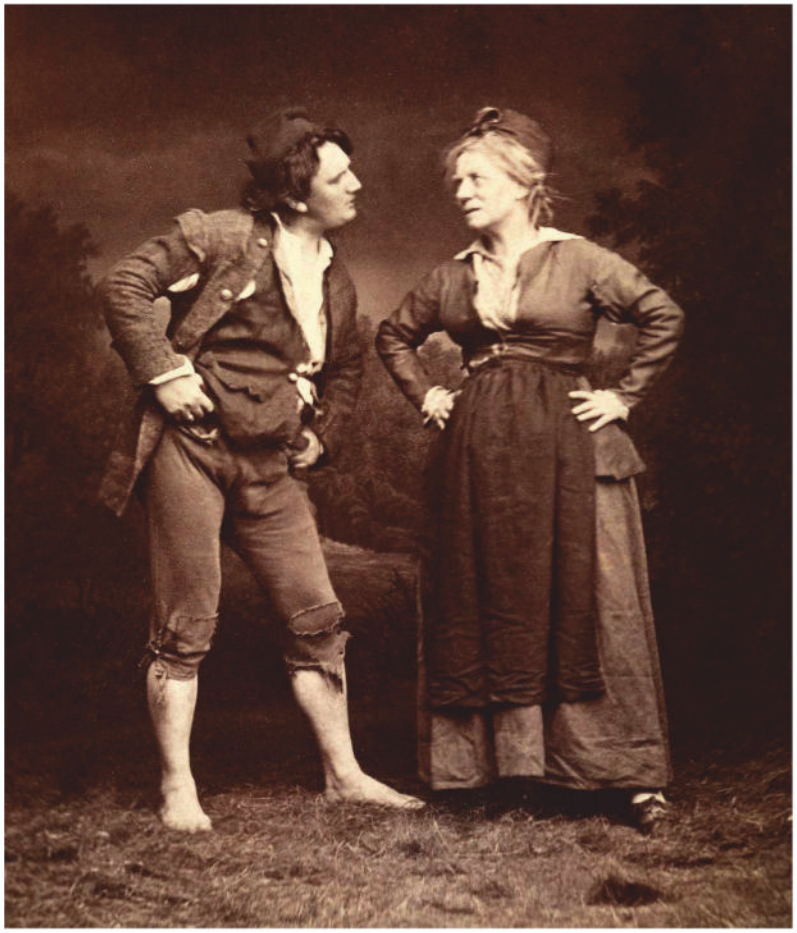
When asked to write music for Ibsen's play *Peer Gynt*, Grieg thought he was facing an impossible challenge. But, as Terry Blain relates, the composer's perseverance resulted in a masterpiece of matchless character and colour

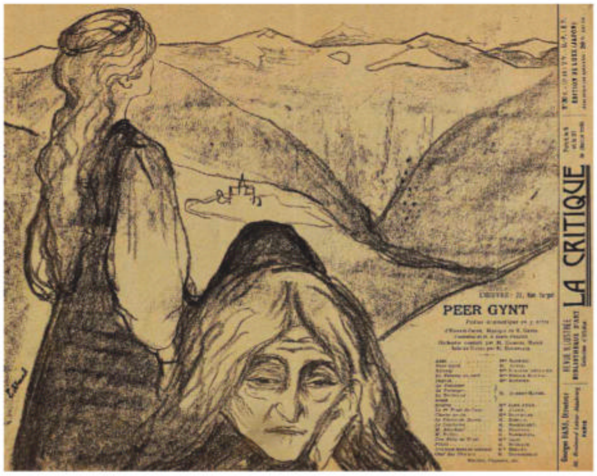


GRIEG
Peer Gynt

'Dear Mr Grieg: I am writing to you in connection with a plan that I propose to implement, and in which I wish to invite your participation.' The tone is impeccably formal and business-like, but the letter sent in January 1874 by the Norwegian writer Henrik Ibsen to his compatriot Edvard Grieg planted the seed for one of the most consequential artistic collaborations of the 19th century. The first ever staging of Ibsen's play *Peer Gynt* was being mooted, and Ibsen wanted Grieg to write the incidental music which he envisaged accompanying the action. 'Please let me know if you are willing to undertake this task,' Ibsen's letter ended.

Grieg hesitated, not least because his first impressions of Ibsen had not been entirely positive. The pair initially met in Rome nine years earlier, when Grieg noted that Ibsen had been 'dead drunk' at a party. A few months later, the playwright was in dubiously high spirits again, demanding that the chairs be cleared for dancing and carousal after a chamber music recital. 'A few glasses of Foglietti had gone to his





Setting the scene: (clockwise from left) the title page of the score for Grieg's *Peer Gynt*; playwright Henrik Ibsen; Henrik Klausen and Sofie Parelius in the first production, 1876; Edvard Munch's programme for an 1896 production; the set for the original production at the Christiania Theatre

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head,' Grieg recorded. It was 'strange', he thought, that 'so great a man can be so tactless and in this one area so obtuse'.

Soon enough, however, Grieg replied to Ibsen in a 'friendly' fashion – swayed, as he later acknowledged, by a generous half-share in the fee payable for the new production. The plan was for Grieg to write the *Peer Gynt* music in the summer of 1874, with the play's premiere tentatively scheduled for early 1875. But from the outset Grieg found the project tricky. 'The work on *Peer Gynt* is proceeding very slowly, there is no possibility that I can finish it by autumn,' he wrote on 27 August. 'It is a terribly difficult play for which to write music.'

The difficulties Grieg encountered came primarily from the multi-faceted nature of Ibsen's play, and its blurring of the distinction between reality and the world of dreams and the subconscious. Originally published in 1867 as a 'dramatic poem' designed for reading rather than staging, *Peer Gynt* centres on the exploits of the ruinously self-seeking, braggadocious Peer, a character from folklore.

Following Peer on his vertiginously unpredictable journeys through Morocco, Egypt and Norway – in the course of which he abducts a bride, trades slaves, and is hailed as 'Emperor of the Self' in a madhouse – Ibsen's drama abounds in startling, proto-cinematic scene-shifts and sharp satire of the Norwegian national character. The text also bristles with a sense of existential insecurity fuelled by the central character's dangerously impulsive behaviour. Ibsen himself at one point called the play 'wild and formless, written recklessly and without regard to consequences'. All of which, Grieg noted, made it the 'most unmusical of all subjects'.

'*Peer Gynt* is a terribly difficult play for which to write music'

Ibsen had, though, plenty of ideas of his own for the music. For the Act I wedding, he told Grieg, a 'special dance melody' should be written; the herd girls' scene should have 'devilry' in it; and Peer's encounter with the gnome-like Bøyg required that 'bird calls must be sung, and church bells and hymns must be heard in the distance'. Grieg accepted some of these suggestions, but continued to struggle with the project as a whole. There was, he said, 'much more music than I had ever dreamed of', and 'it doesn't interest me'.

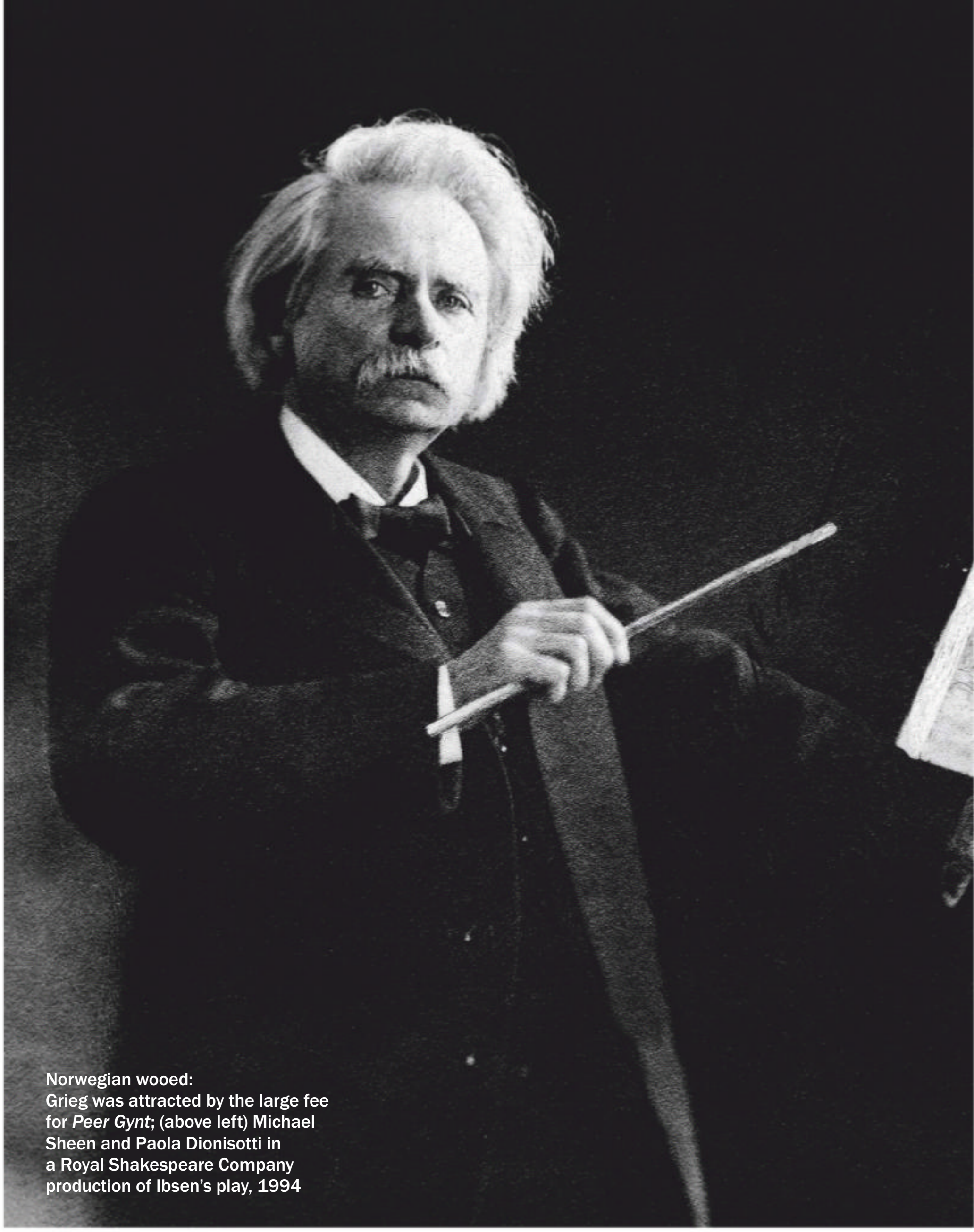
By July 1875, however, he had completed the 26 numbers which would accompany the action of *Peer Gynt*, and forwarded the score to the Christiania Theatre (in present-day Oslo), where the play would be presented. Ibsen was delighted. 'That you yourself will be present for the music rehearsals is, naturally, a foregone conclusion', he wrote. Having previously expressed concerns about the theatre's orchestra, Grieg would certainly have wanted to oversee preparations.

Instead, a heavy blow intervened: within three months, both of Grieg's parents died in Bergen. In mourning, he felt unable to go to Christiania for either the rehearsals or the opening night performance.

He also continued to have reservations about the score – too much of it, he reckoned, skated on 'the thin ice of caricature', and 'only in a few places is the music just music'. But the premiere, on 24 February 1876, was wildly successful, and critics immediately highlighted the vital contribution Grieg's music made to Ibsen's visceral drama. 'In totality', one wrote, Grieg's contribution was 'a most exceptional piece of work', evincing 'a special gift as a dramatic composer'. There was, the review continued, 'a bold originality in the whole musical treatment'.

Grieg himself had worried that his music too slavishly mimicked the fine detail of Ibsen's text, and was too 'programmatic' in nature. He famously castigated the orgiastic 'In the Hall of the Mountain King', subsequently one of the score's best-known numbers, for all-too-accurately mirroring Ibsen's warts-and-all depiction of the unpleasantly self-serving monarch. 'Something that I literally can't bear listening to', is how he described the piece, 'because it absolutely reeks of cow-pies, exaggerated Norwegian nationalism and trollish self-satisfaction'.

But it was precisely this ability to render evocatively nuances of character, scene and situation that caught the imagination of Grieg's early listeners. 'Anitra's Dance', 'Solveig's Song' and 'Peer Gynt's Serenade' also quickly became popular, and were published in piano arrangements. Grieg finally saw the Christiania production of *Peer Gynt* in November 1876, when the audience gave him a 'rapturous' ovation. It ran for 38 performances, before being halted by a fire which almost totally destroyed the theatre in January 1877.

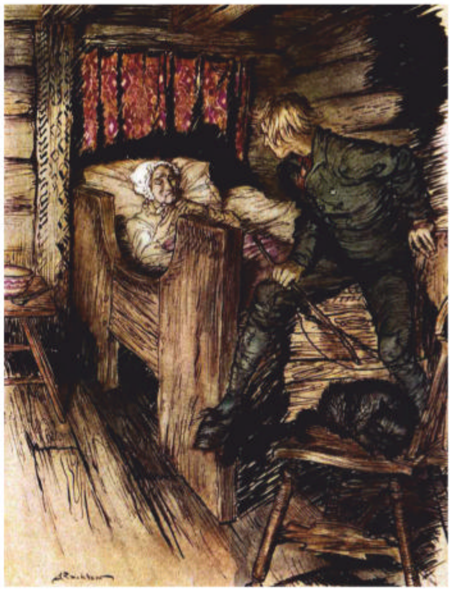


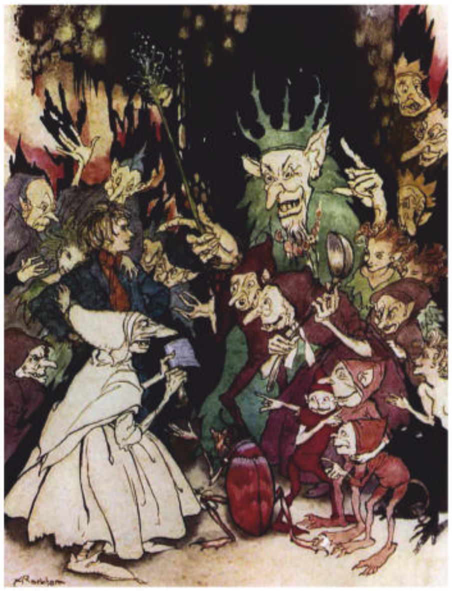
Norwegian wooed:
Grieg was attracted by the large fee for *Peer Gynt*; (above left) Michael Sheen and Paola Dionisotti in a Royal Shakespeare Company production of Ibsen's play, 1994

> 'I am bombarded by copyists and music directors who grab the pages from me'

But that was not the end of the story. Ten years later, in 1886, when *Peer Gynt* was staged in an abbreviated version in Copenhagen – the Christiania premiere lasted five hours – Grieg took the opportunity of thoroughly revising the music. It was, he said, 'almost totally reconceptualised and reorchestrated', and four new movements were added. 'I am bombarded by copyists and music directors who grab the pages from me one by one as soon as I've completed them'. This time, Grieg was also present at rehearsals, conducting, coaching singers, directing actors and generally enjoying himself enormously. 'The music was a great success,' he reported, and the play's satiric content emerged in even sharper profile than in Christiania.

With the *Peer Gynt* music now pleasingly refurbished, Grieg finally felt able to let some of it be published. In 1888, he took four movements – 'Morning Mood', 'The





Fateful encounters: (left) as depicted by Arthur Rackham, Peer Gynt visits his mother, Åse, on her deathbed; Peer before the King of the Trolls, as heard in 'In the Hall of the Mountain King'

Death of Åse', 'Anitra's Dance', 'In the Hall of the Mountain King' – and published them as his Op. 46. The Suite proved ragingly popular in Norway and beyond. At the London premiere, something close to pandemonium erupted – 'a jubilant demonstration that was like a pack of animals!', Grieg recorded. A further Suite (Op. 55) of four numbers – 'The Abduction of the Bride', 'Arabian Dance', 'Peer Gynt's Homecoming', 'Solveig's Song' – followed in 1893, and proved equally successful.

Partly because the two Suites slaked the appetite of concert-goers for *Peer Gynt's* music, and partly because Grieg continued tinkering with the piece, the full score was never published in his lifetime. The year after his death in 1907, however, an edition purporting to be complete was printed. But several numbers were missing, and it was not until 1988 that a definitive score was published. This finally enabled conductors to examine the *Peer Gynt* music in its entirety, and excellent recordings of it have been made since, with excerpts from Ibsen's play spoken by actors.

Where the two Suites had previously given only a partial impression of the *Peer Gynt* music, these recordings enabled the totality and sweep of Grieg's achievement to be fully appreciated. 'To write music depicting Norwegian scenery, the life of the people, the country's history, and folk poetry,' Grieg commented in 1875, 'appears to me to be a calling in which I feel I could achieve something.' These objectives were handsomely realised in *Peer Gynt*, which alongside other works by Grieg – the Piano Concerto and *Lyric Pieces*, in particular – earned Norway an international reputation it had never had before in classical music. 'It was through his art that music lovers all over the world got their first glimpse of Norway's indigenous culture,' as one biographer puts it.

And what of Grieg's relationship with Ibsen in the post-*Peer Gynt* period? For a while it looked as though further joint projects might be possible. Ibsen initially offered to turn an early play of his, *Olaf Liljekrans*, into an opera libretto for Grieg, but nothing came of it. Years later, in 1893, he made a similar offer to adapt another play, *The Vikings at Helgeland*, but this too was aborted. And yet the bonds of friendship forged in creating *Peer Gynt* together lasted. When Ibsen died in 1906, aged 78, Grieg's enduring affection for his old collaborator movingly surfaced. 'How much I owe him! Poor, great Ibsen!', he wrote. 'It is as if he carried within him a chunk of ice that would not melt. But under this chunk of ice lay a fervent love of humanity.'

Spanning a period of many years, Peer Gynt's journey also covers a great distance, his wanderings from Norwegian mountains to north African deserts giving Grieg a unique opportunity to indulge in a rich palette of musical colours. It's time, then, to explore the key moments and how the composer applied his genius to them... ▶

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Gnome, sweet gnome: The Wombles indluge in a little troll playing, 1974

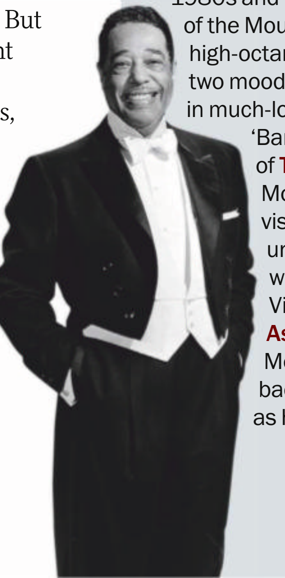
Duke, Bart and instant coffee

Grieg's Peer Gynt in popular culture

Given its huge popularity and wealth of characterful, instantly memorable tunes, it's not entirely surprising that Grieg's music for *Peer Gynt* has popped up in popular culture in all manner of ways, from pop songs to appearances in films, cartoons and TV ads.

Leading the way in the music world was **Duke Ellington** (below), whose 1960 'Swinging Suite' presented five movements from *Peer Gynt* in jazzed-up form. The Grieg Foundation failed to see the fun, getting it banned in Norway, ostensibly on copyright grounds. History does not appear to record what the Foundation later made of **The Wombles**' 'Hall of the Mountain Womble' (1974), **Erasure**'s 'In the Hall of the Mountain King' (1987) or, most recently, US power metal band **Kamelot**'s 2001 track 'Forever', based on 'Solveig's Song'.

Opposite ends of the *Peer Gynt* mood spectrum have found their way into TV commercials. In the early 1970s, for instance, the gentle calm of 'Morning Mood' was used to remind viewers that **Nescafé** instant coffee is 'the better way to start the day', in complete contrast to the **Alton Towers** theme park, which in the 1980s and '90s adopted 'In the Hall of the Mountain King' to advertise its high-octane thrills. And those same two mood-setters have also featured in much-loved animated series: in 'Bart Carny', a 1998 episode of **The Simpsons**, it's 'Morning Mood' that accompanies the vision of a half-eaten burger unwrapping in the early sun, while in the 1982 'Robot Vikings' episode of Japan's **Astro Boy**, 'In the Hall of the Mountain King' provides the background to our young hero as he goes about his business.



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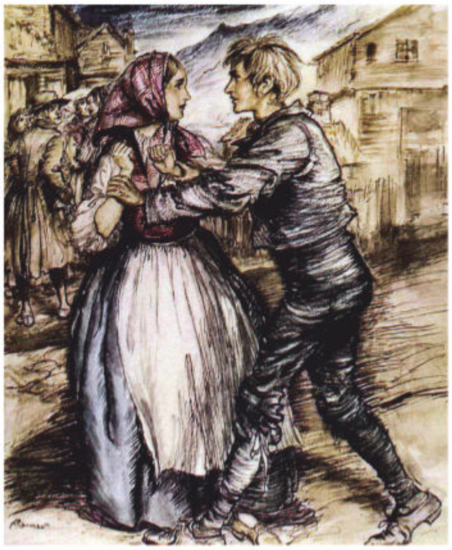
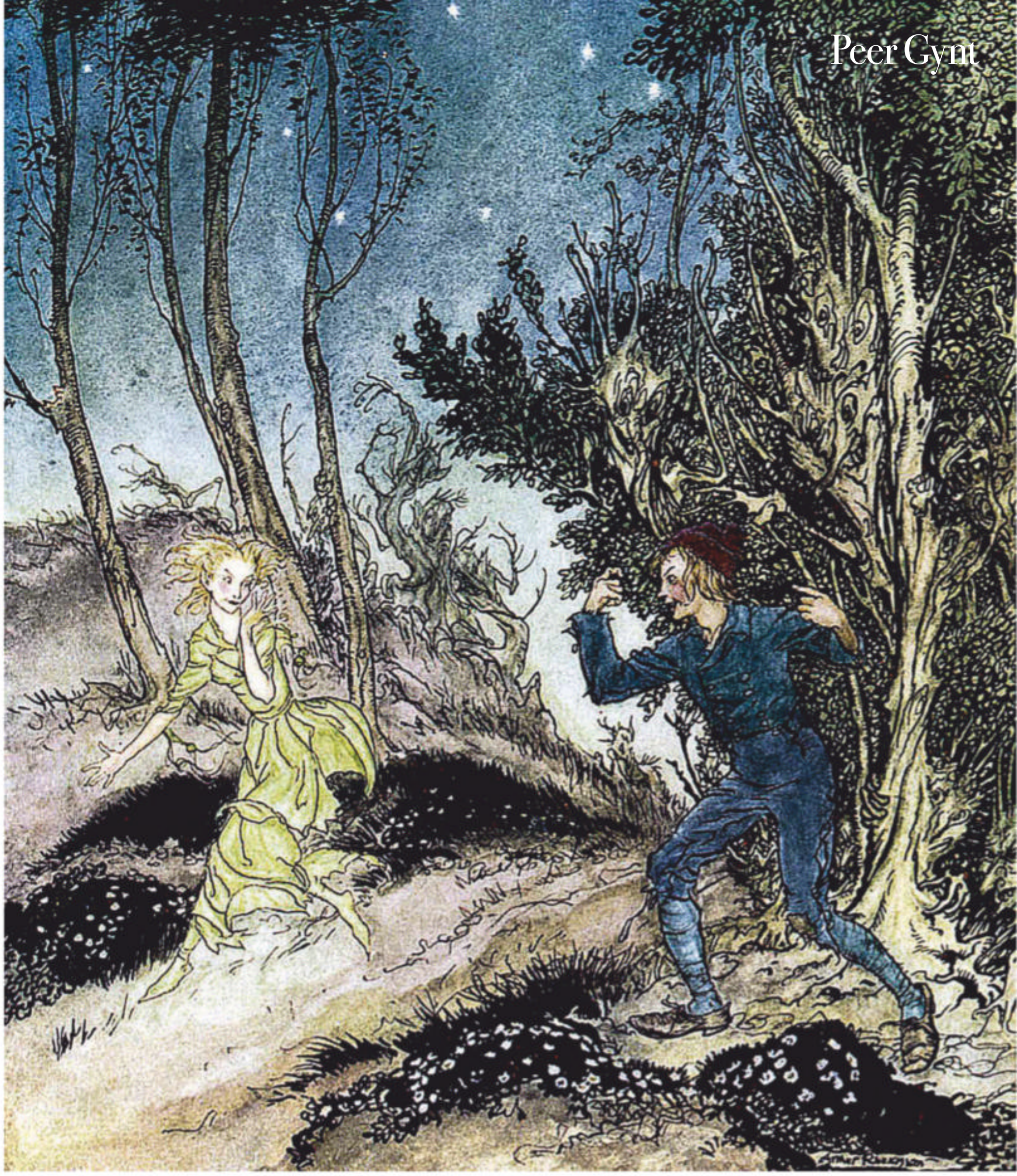
Instant attraction: Rackham's illustrations of (below) Peer and Solveig at the wedding and (right) Peer chasing after the woman in green





Prelude: At the Wedding

Before the curtain rises, Grieg provides an orchestral Prelude. It opens in bristling fashion, with edgy rhythms adumbrating both the wedding Peer attends in Act I, and the restless nature of his character. A solo clarinet and oboe preview the lovelorn song performed in Act IV by Solveig, who attracts Peer's attention at the wedding. Grieg also includes two solos for viola, written in the style of the Norwegian *halling* and *springar* folk dances. 'They must sound as if from afar, but sharply accented and authentic,' he wrote.

The Abduction of the Bride: Ingrid's Lament

A predominantly desolate movement, describing the plight of Ingrid, the bride whom Peer abducted at her wedding. Because the two have since slept together, she wishes to marry Peer. But he has already tired of Ingrid, and abandons her. Grieg wanted a strong contrast to be drawn between Ingrid's slow-moving music and the 'furious' passages describing Peer.

Peer Gynt and the Herd Girls

On the run in the mountains, Peer encounters three feisty dairymaids, with whom he gets drunk and spends the night. Grieg depicts their antics with a swirling vitality which stylistically recalls Wagner's opera *The flying Dutchman*, with sung parts for the maids and a spoken role for Peer. Grieg expected the scene to make 'an altogether splendid, wild, devilish and sensuous' impression.

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Peer Gynt and the Woman in Green

In a meadow, Peer meets a 'woman dressed in green', who claims to be a troll king's daughter. He is immediately smitten by her, and the pair ride off on an enormous pig to the troll king's mountain lair. The twirling oboe arabesques portray the green woman, while scampering double bass and cello lines trace Peer's excited response to her exotic, alluring appearance.

In the Hall of the Mountain King

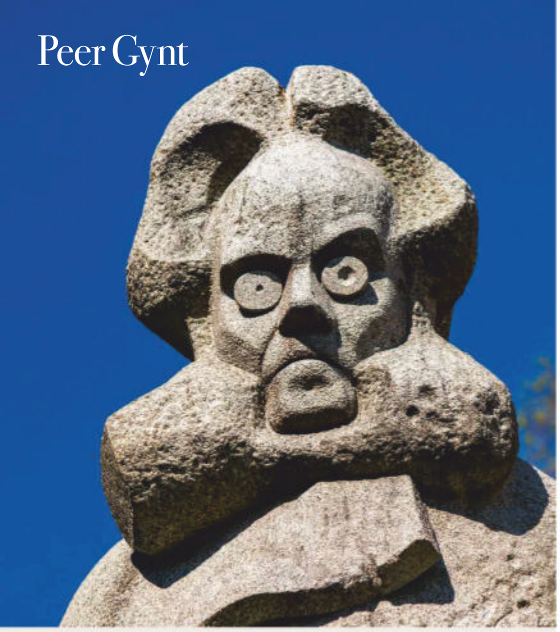
Peer enters the hall of the mountain king, where there is a large gathering of troll-courtiers, gnomes and sprites. As Peer approaches the king's throne, a pair of snorting bassoons depicts the crowd of retainers milling around him. Their threats of violence are mirrored in Grieg's increasingly frenzied music. 'Kill him! Kill him!', the choir screams, as the commotion reaches orgiastic levels. 'The bass drum and cymbals must thunder and crash for all they're worth,' Grieg advises.

The Death of Åse

Fleeing the consequences of his philandering past, Peer visits his mother Åse in her cabin, and finds her dying. Scored for muted strings, Grieg's music for this scene is based on the poignant three-note motif heard at the outset. The tone is that of a sorrowful lament, rising in intensity before ebbing away to nothing. 'Rarely has a deathbed scene been painted so movingly in sound,' as one Grieg biography puts it.

Morning Mood

It is years later, and Peer is now a 'distinguished-looking middle-aged gentleman' involved in shady business dealings. For many, Grieg's prelude to Act IV is synonymous with the magnificence of a Norwegian fjord, but it actually

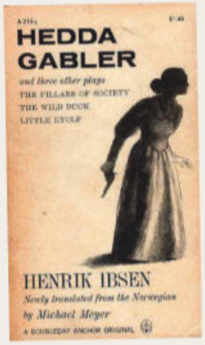


A giant of Norwegian theatre

The awesome genius of Henrik Ibsen

There are well-known statues of Henrik Ibsen in the centres of both Oslo and Bergen. In the former, he looks stern; in the latter, plain terrifying (above). Is this why, when Mahler saw him in a Christiania hotel lobby in 1891, the composer didn't dare approach him? Or maybe it was that, even for someone of Mahler's own growing reputation, the great Norwegian playwright's standing was so lofty as to demand respect from a distance?

Born into an affluent family in the town of Skien in 1828, Ibsen spent his early adult years working in theatres in Bergen and then Christiania while writing plays, most of which received little attention. It was only when, disillusioned with his home country, he and his family moved to Italy that success started to flow, beginning with *Brand* in 1865. *Peer Gynt* followed soon after, as did a further move to Dresden, Germany. Only returning for brief periods, Ibsen would live away from Norway for around 27 years, during which time he would pen masterpieces of the theatre such as *A Doll's House*, *Ghosts* and *Hedda Gabler* (left).



Breaking new ground by tackling moral and political issues head-on, Ibsen's influence would extend to Oscar Wilde, James Joyce and many others. His face (slightly less scarily than in Bergen) has appeared on Norwegian banknotes and on the tail fins of Norwegian Air planes, and the Visit Norway website describes him as 'undoubtedly one of the greatest playwrights in the universe'.

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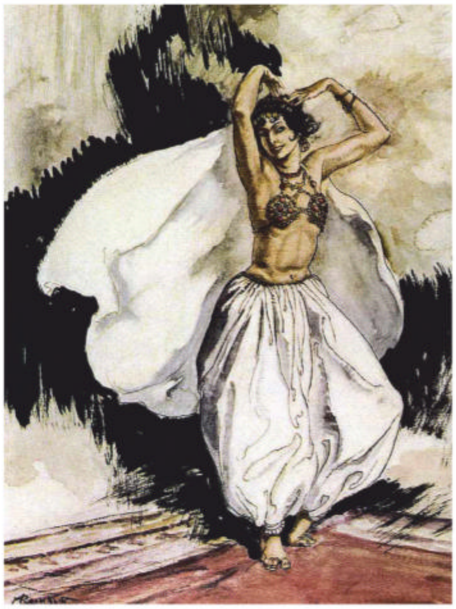

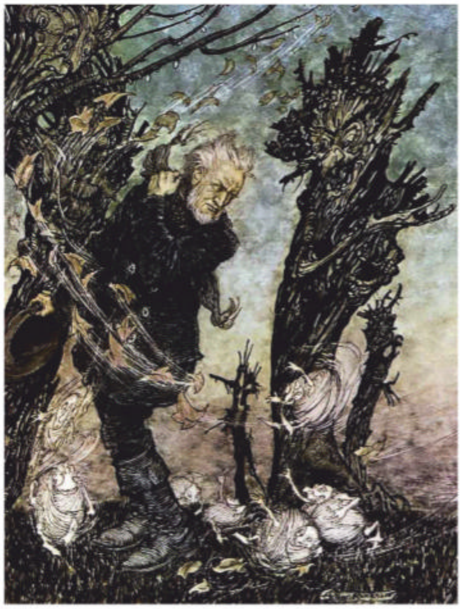

Exotic thrills: (above) Anitra dances in north Africa; (right) Rackham's *Peer and the Threadballs*, showing the wayward wanderer returning home

depicts sunrise on the west coast of Morocco. 'I think of the sun breaking through the clouds at the point in the score where the *forte* first appears,' Grieg wrote.

Arabian Dance

Peer is robbed, dons Bedouin clothing and is mistaken for a prophet by a local tribe. Reclining on 'long, low cushions', he drinks coffee and smokes a long pipe as a group of girls sings and dances in his honour. A sinuous flute and piccolo melody, lightly tapped cymbals, and throbbing bass drum are among the details intended by Grieg to create a 'genuinely Turkish' impression. He hoped the dancing girls would each have a tambourine, 'for that is the only way to get the sound I have in mind'.

Anitra's Dance

Anitra, the tribal chieftain's daughter, dances for Peer, who is instantly enamoured when 'her legs twiddle as fast as drumsticks'. Grieg described Anitra's music as 'a delicate little dance that I hope will sound lovely and beautiful', and gave it the delicately traipsing rhythm of a mazurka. The first violins spin a seductive melody, with *en pointe* pizzicato punctuation from the lower strings. 'I would be grateful if you would treat this piece with special affection,' Grieg added.

Solveig's Song

Solveig is now 'a middle-aged woman, fair-haired and comely'. She sits outside her cabin, spinning and singing, still believing that one day Peer will return to be with her. Her song is sorrowful in tone, although the airy chorus of vocalise appended to each of the two verses reflects her enduring hope that a reunion will happen. 'One day you will come,' she sings. 'I know that in my heart.' The song 'reveals Solveig's character,' Grieg commented. 'A folk-song style must be preserved throughout.'

Peer Gynt's Homecoming

Finally, Peer, 'a sturdy old man with ice-grey hair and beard', returns to his native Norway. As though to symbolise the turbulent life that he has led, a storm is raging as his ship approaches the coast. Shrieking woodwind and thwacks of timpani evoke the howling gale and waves crashing, with dramatic contrasts of dynamic. 'Every *crescendo* and *diminuendo* must be strongly emphasised,' Grieg recommended, 'and the tempo must be very agitated.'

Solveig's Cradle Song

Peer surveys the detritus of his life and realises he is a 'lost' individual whose sins are 'numbered in wild throngs'. He encounters Solveig, who is now almost blind. Peer is racked with guilt, but she assures him that he has done her no wrong. As Peer buries his head in her lap and the sun rises, Solveig begins a moving lullaby of comfort and absolution, with an offstage choir assisting – 'a poetic effect using simple means', as Grieg put it. 'I will rock you and awake you,' Solveig sings. 'So sleep and dream, my own dear boy.'

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Georgia on my mind

A product of the fertile Georgian music system, star pianist Mariam Batsashvili speaks to Michael Church about Beethoven, artistic freedom and teaching via social media

'I was born twice,' said the great Russian bass Feodor Chaliapin. 'In Kazan I opened my eyes to life, and in Tbilisi to music.' What is it about music and the Georgians? Some members of that Caucasian tribe believe there's a special musical gene hard-wired into their DNA. And walking through the streets of their capital Tbilisi one sunlit Sunday morning, I felt the force of that idea.

I came upon a group of young men with tear-stained faces, clutching bottles of vodka and singing a slow and beautiful polyphonic lament. This was their way of mourning a friend who had died in a car crash, and would I like to join them for a shot? I walked on past newspaper vendors selling piano sheet-music, and where else in the world would you see that? Meanwhile, in the streets surrounding Sioni Cathedral, impromptu circles of middle-aged men were singing folk songs in immaculate three-part counterpoint: all spontaneous, with no one in charge.

Lodging with Georgian friends, I had noted the contrapuntal perfection with which they sang on feast days round the dinner table – no matter how much they'd drunk. But nothing prepared me for the biggest surprise I encountered on that walk: a children's choir, out in the street being taught a traditional Georgian song, full of awkward jumps and dissonances. Their teacher let me watch, and after an hour the young singers had not only mastered it (without a score) but had also learned all three parts.

Tchaikovsky conducted in Tbilisi, and Verdi reworked *Aida* there; though the city's conservatoire was discriminated against by Tsarists and Soviets – both seeing it quite correctly as a hotbed of Caucasus nationalism – it was always a cradle of musical excellence.

And always against the odds. When I visited it in 1997, its eminent director ruefully spelt out their economic realities: their instruments were clapped-out, they had no money for computers or scores (this was before the internet), and his salary was a princely $25 per week. Much has changed since then, with government and private donors clubbing together to pay the staff a modest but liveable wage, and the conservatoire is now the jewel in Tbilisi's cultural crown.

MAXIMILIAN KOENIG, GETTY

A grand tradition: Mariam Batsashvili's sound was forged in her homeland; (below) Georgians perform in the streets of in Tbilisi, 2006; (above right) as a young student with her teacher Natalia Natsvlishvili; with The Netherlands' Queen Máxima after winning the Franz Liszt Piano Competition, 2014

The star among the conservatoire's recent alumnae is the 32-year-old pianist Mariam Batsashvili, who is making waves on many fronts: as an authority on Liszt, as the creator of a highly original teaching method for amateur pianists, and above all as a top-flight keyboard virtuoso. There's not a shred of pretention in her pianism; the immaculate purity of her sound and the clarity of her interpretations are wonderfully dependable qualities. The origins of her sound were quintessentially Georgian. As a baby, she was mesmerised by her piano-playing cousins and by the table songs led by her grandfather, who barely stopped singing long enough to eat. 'Traditional Georgian music still gets under my skin,' she says.

> 'Artistic freedom is about removing your ego. Only then can the real music happen'

At five, she started taking lessons with Natalia Natsvlishvili, who remained her tutor until her death 24 years later. 'I have spent most of my life as her pupil, and not just musically,' says Batsashvili. 'It's because of her that I am the person I am.' At six, she started studying at one of Tbilisi's junior music schools, where she got a grounding in musical analysis.

At seven, she won her first competition, in which she played the solo part of Bach's arrangement of a Marcello oboe concerto – which she still sometimes programmes in her recitals – with her teacher supplying the orchestral accompaniment. 'I earned €20, which was a lot of money back then,' she recalls. 'That was the first time I realised I had a hobby I loved, which could earn me money as well. So, I said, "This is my job," and since then it's never changed.' More competitions followed, all of which – barring a second prize which grievously wounded her pride – she won.

Her late adolescence was studded with successes. In 2014 she won the 10th Franz Liszt Piano Competition in Utrecht, after having already triumphed in the International Franz Liszt Competition for Young Pianists in Weimar in 2011. The following year she received the Arturo Benedetti Michelangeli Prize and spent the 2016–17 season as a 'Rising Star' of the European Concert Hall Organisation. Since 2017 she has been an official Yamaha Artist.

Natalia Natsvlishvili was clearly a tyrant, forbidding the 13-year-old Batsashvili to learn Liszt's *Dante Fantasia* until she had read Dante's *Divine Comedy*. 'That book gave me nightmares – I was really scared,' she says. 'But I see now that she wanted me to find the heart of that piece, to understand what people could go through. When I give masterclasses, I follow Natalia's lead and insist that students learn the background to what they are playing – what the composer's musical intention was, and what they were going through at the time of composition.

'Natalia absolutely forbade me to listen to any other performers until I had completely mastered the notes of a piece, including all the dynamics and expressive indications. Only then would she allow me to turn my ego on, making the piece my own, so that it reflects my honest response. You have to go through all the possible responses to a piece until you get to the truth of it. I record myself a lot, and when I listen back, I often go, "Oh my god, who does she think she is?" Artistic freedom is not when I feel free, but when I have accomplished every step of this process – when I have removed my ego. Only then can the real music happen. I am just the medium, the conduit for this process. Music comes to me, and through me it goes to the audience.' ▶

Love affair: with a Yamaha piano

Yamaha power

A match made in heaven

How did your Yamaha connection arise?

'In the Liszt Competition in Utrecht, which I won, I was offered ten minutes on the stage with eight different grand pianos to choose from. And I needed less than two minutes to make my choice, which was for the Yamaha CFX.'

Why was that?

'With some instruments you feel you can't move fast enough, and to make the articulation clear you have to really work. The keys of the Yamaha reacted very fast to my repetitions, and answered my other requirements instantly – and they are all essential for me. I need the sound to create a warm atmosphere, and I want it to be beautiful, with many different colours. And what's supremely important is the *legato*: with some pianos you do your best, but there still seem to be tiny millisecond holes between the notes. The Yamaha passed all these tests.'

Is the Yamaha really better than the Steinway, the Fazioli or the Steingraeber?

'You can find beautiful examples of all those makes, but with the Yamaha you know every time that it will be ideal. I never have bad surprises with them. I always know in advance that they will give me all I need.'

CHRIS CHRISTODOULOU

MARIAM BATSASHVILI
INFLUENCES

A serious purpose: (left) performing at Wigmore Hall, London; *Influences*, her new album for Warner

I've heard dozens of recorded versions of Beethoven's 'Appassionata' Sonata but never one as serene and poised as hers. Was that the result of her process? 'When I was younger, I used to go crazy with the passion in that piece, but when I grew up, I realised I shouldn't restrict it to my own passion. In that piece Beethoven is telling us about all the possible emotions, everything that a human can experience. It needs be intimate – and allow player and listener to breathe.'

> 'I am a very direct person and, as my pupils know, I like to say what I think'

For her recording of this work on her new Warner album *Influences*, however, different challenges arose. 'I always prefer to do live recordings,' she says. 'My producers say it's very difficult to edit me because I never play the same way twice. It's not that my ideas keep changing, but when I record, I always have stress – I'm so aware that a recording is being laid down forever, and in small and subtle ways that can affect my playing. In concert I am more forgiving towards myself. So, in the studio I record a piece straight through four or five times, and then we select the best. That's how we did it for the "Appassionata".'

Batsashvili's recital programmes are eclectic, making illuminating juxtapositions. Does she have any musical blind spots? Any composer she feels she should like, but doesn't? After a long and awkward pause, she blurts out: 'It's a naughty thing to say, but anything composed during – or after – the second half of the 20th century.' Really?! 'I've tried, really tried, and in my student years I had to play many things I didn't like. This antipathy even includes music expressly written for me. A composer was commissioned to write me a piece, and he worked hard to get to know my style. But it was too repetitive, so I asked him to cut out two pages. I apologised, but he was very hurt.' At this point, her dark-browed seriousness gives way to a wicked laugh: 'Now that score has disappeared! My problem is that I am a very direct person, and, as my pupils know, I say what I think.'

Are those pupils in Germany, where she now lives? 'Oh no – on Instagram and TikTok. I have 71,000 followers.' How come? 'They look at little videos I have uploaded, and in one minute I am showing what not to do at the piano – without speaking – and then I show how to work on it, for just a couple of seconds. And then I show the end result. That whole process lasts less than one minute. It's very fast, very efficient. One person has emailed me to say that a year at music college had been less useful to him than two of my little videos. That's obviously an exaggeration, but I'm very happy that my videos can help. I feel I am continuing Natalia's legacy. I want as many people as possible to be able to play the piano.'

No money changes hands, she adds. 'But it makes me more popular. And it makes more people buy my music.' Is she taking a leaf out of Lang Lang's book? 'Who is that?' And we in Britain thought he was world-famous! When I describe Lang Lang's work with amateurs at railway stations, she pricks up her ears: 'He sounds good! I must find out more about him.'

As a counterweight to all this populism, Batsashvili is also engaged on an intellectual crusade. 'My aim is to convince people that Liszt wasn't a mere showman, that there was great seriousness in his attitude to music. My point is to defend his legacy.' She's currently researching into spirituality through Liszt's music.

Finally some quick questions. What – or who – does she listen to when off duty? A typically surprising answer: 'Doris Day and Dean Martin.' What is her biggest extra-curricular passion? Another one: 'I'm mad about beautiful cars. My dream is a top-of-the-range Porsche.' What did she do in the lockdown? 'I was practising and giving online concerts. I was one of the first pianists to do concerts from their home. Oh, one more thing I did during the lockdown.' And what was that? 'I got divorced!' And out comes that wicked laugh again.

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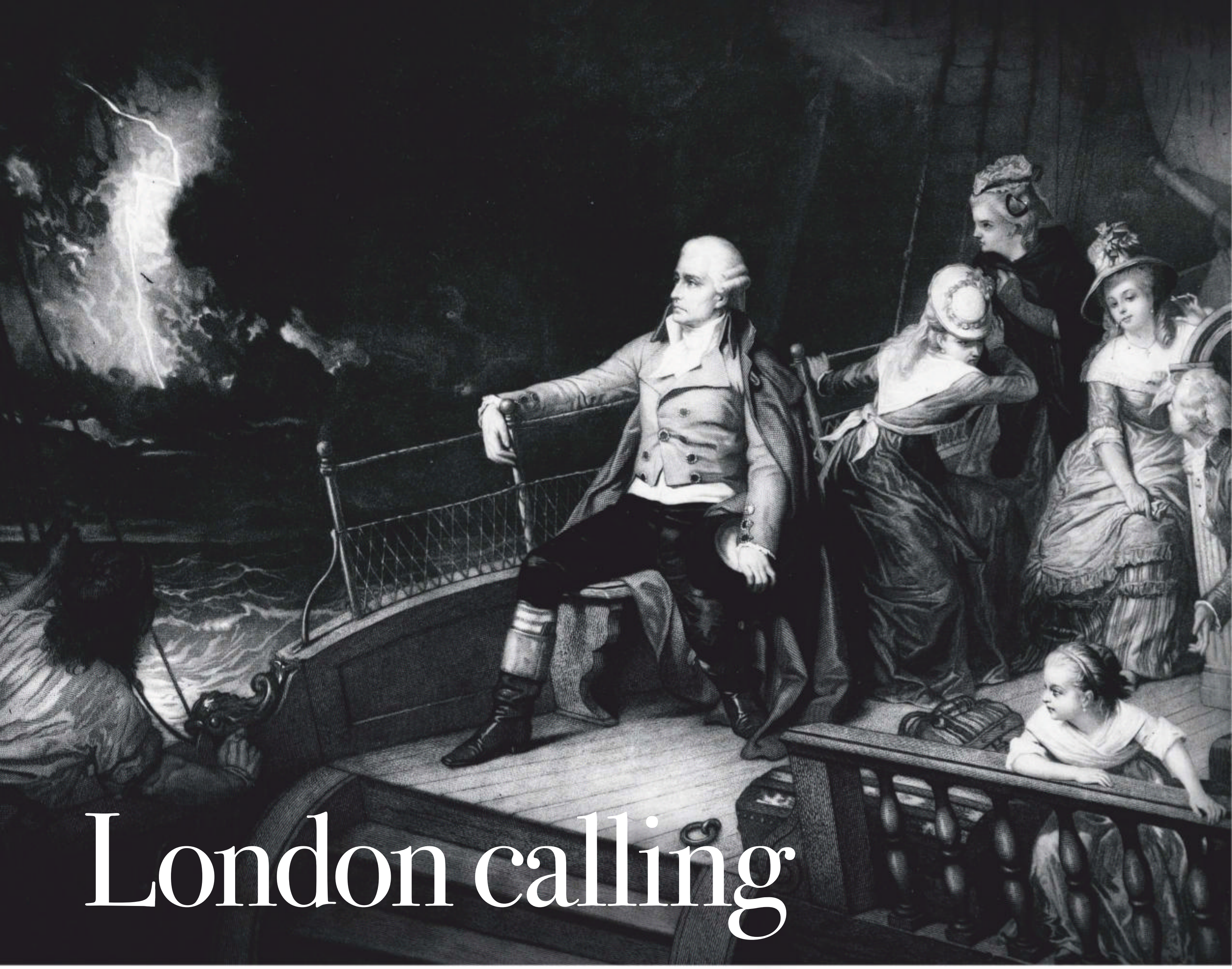

London calling

Clifford Hall recounts Haydn's huge successes in the English capital, a far cry from the composer's hard-up days in a freezing Vienna garret

Joseph Haydn looked every bit the European celebrity on the night of 4 May 1795. Newly opened in 1791 after a fire, the King's Theatre glowed in the brilliant flicker of candle chandeliers. At the front of the hall stood Haydn in full formal dress, as eyewitnesses later recalled seeing him, 'in a tie wig, with a sword at his side'. The concertgoers – London's most ardent connoisseurs of music – spilled into every available seat, their silks rustling as they turned their eyes toward the 63-year-old composer. It was his night, his long-awaited benefit, and the evening would become the stuff of legend.

The programme showcased the breadth of his genius, with half the works performed being his own. Premiering 230 years ago, his final English symphony, today known as the 'London' Symphony (No. 104), ended the first half of the concert. As the *Morning Chronicle* reported two days later, 'He rewarded the good intentions of his friends by writing a new overture for the occasion, which for fullness, richness and majesty, in all its parts, is thought by some of the best judges to surpass all his other compositions.'

Haydn himself was no less pleased. Reflecting on the evening's triumph, he recorded in his diary, 'The whole company was thoroughly pleased and so was I. I made 4,000 gulden this evening: such a thing is possible only in England' – a sum equivalent to £45,000 today, it was a

> 'The whole company was pleased and so was I. I made 4,000 gulden this evening; such a thing is possible only in England'

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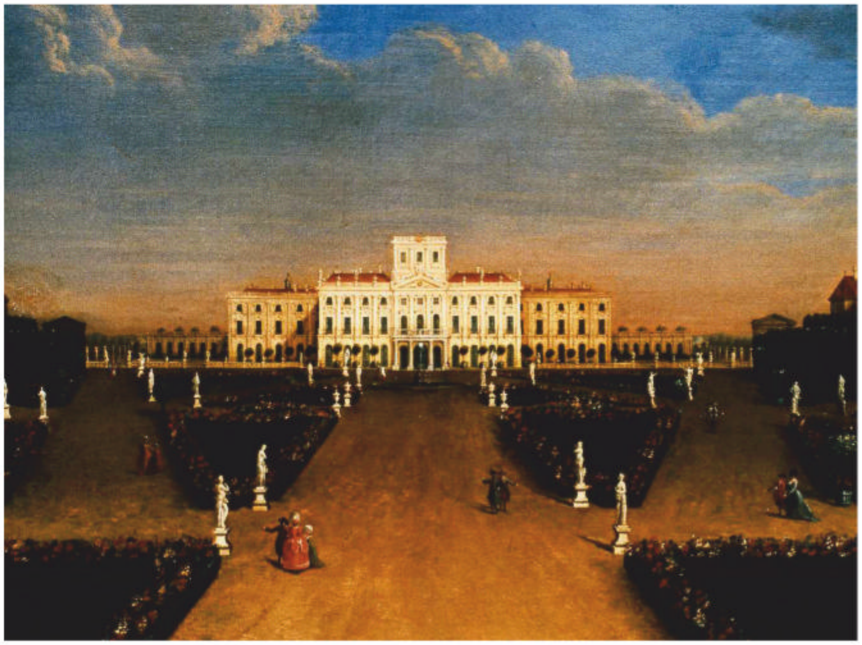

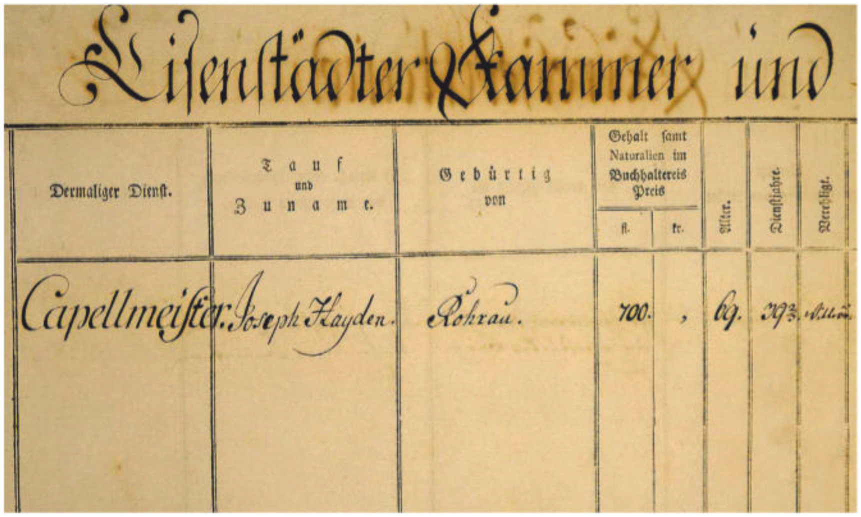

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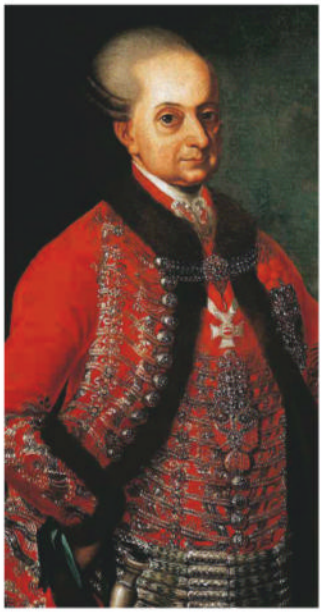
windfall indeed. By the end of his 1791 and '95 London visits, Haydn had earned 24,000 gulden and netted 13,000 – equivalent to more than 20 years of working for the Esterházy court, seat of the powerful Hungarian family whose patronage had shaped most of his professional life.

Yet not everyone agreed. One concertgoer, scribbling in the margin of the printed programme, dismissed the new symphony as 'too noisy'. 'Think about what an average concertgoer at the Proms might write about a new composition,' says Nicholas Mathew, author of *The Haydn Economy* (2022). 'That's the thing about "reception" – often the kind historians write about is what was published by critics or connoisseurs. Haydn was one of the earliest composers ever to have been written about at such length and with such rapidity following his concerts – and one of the first to have composed music knowing that it would be written about.'



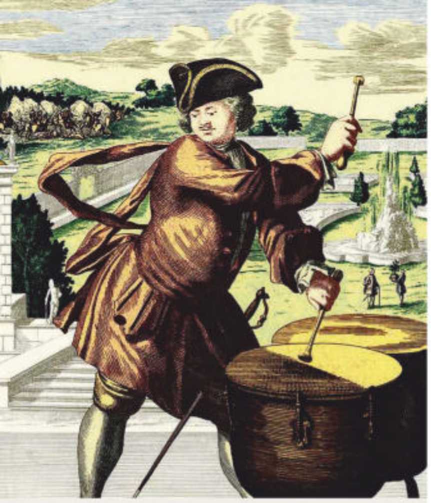
Nothing ventured, nothing gained: (main) Haydn sails to England in a storm on the Channel; (left) Esterházy Palace, where he worked for 30 years; a wage ledger recording his pay as Kapellmeister, 1801; (bottom) Nikolaus Esterházy

Every era has its haters. By 1795, however, Haydn's position was secure enough that such passing judgements hardly mattered. Beneath the glittering success of London lay the memory of constraint and challenge. After his dismissal from St Stephen's Cathedral Choir School in Vienna around 1749, the young Haydn endured over a decade of hardship. As HC Robbins Landon and David Wyn Jones recount in *Haydn: His Life and Music* (1988), he 'took lodgings in a wretched garret… without a stove, and barely protected from the rain', supporting himself by teaching and performing. Later Haydn wrote, 'When I was sitting at my old worm-eaten spinet, I envied no king his lot.' Those lean years forged the resilience that would serve him in business and music. Relief finally came in 1761, when he entered the service of the Esterházy family.

For nearly three decades, Haydn served the Esterházys as Kapellmeister, overseeing their private orchestra and composing symphonies, operas and church music. Much of his time was consumed by the whims of Prince Nikolaus Esterházy, who adored the baryton, a bowed instrument fitted with sympathetic and plucked strings. Difficult to play and already fading from use elsewhere in Europe, the baryton is virtually unknown today. But Nikolaus was passionate about it, and to please his patron Haydn composed over 120 works for the instrument – music rarely performed beyond the palace walls.

The role brought prestige, but the financial reality was sobering. His annual salary was just 782 gulden 30 kreuzer. Bound by a restrictive contract, he was 'under permanent obligation… neither to communicate such new compositions… nor to allow them to be copied', effectively signing away his publishing rights.

Like many young artists, Haydn found himself locked into a contract that heavily favoured his patron. A modern parallel can be drawn with Billy Joel, who at 22 signed a long-term contract with producer Artie Ripp of Family Productions. In a recent documentary interview, Joel recalled just how much he had given up: 'He got my publishing rights, he even got my copyrights. I didn't know at the time what I had given away. But to be fair, the only person who believed in me back at the beginning of things was Artie Ripp. He put my money where his mouth was, and it wasn't a good deal. But it was a deal.' Ripp held onto those rights until 1986, only surrendering them under pressure from Columbia Records president Walter Yetnikoff. Both men, in different centuries, learned the same hard lesson: talent does not guarantee control.



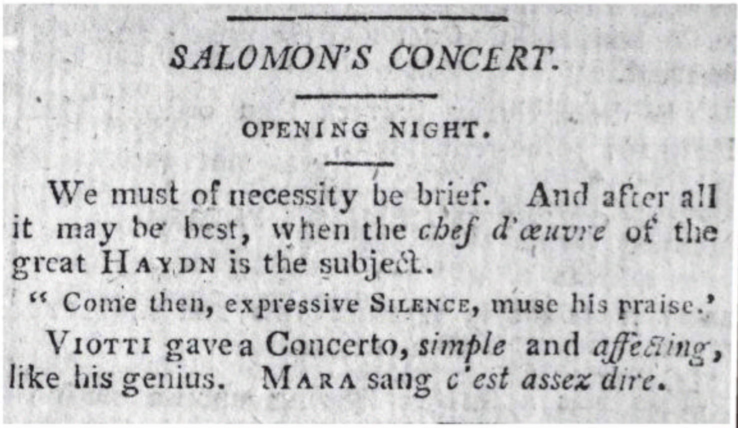
Capital gains

The London symphonies

During his trips to London in the 1790s, Haydn composed his final 12 symphonies, Nos. 93-104. Though each stands on its own, together they represent Haydn's distinctive late style and reveal a remarkable consistency in invention and character.

The first movements often begin with a stately introduction before launching into a lively *allegro*. Haydn expanded the orchestra's palette, introducing clarinets in Symphony No. 99, and made more prominent use of trumpets and timpani. The finales brim with folk-like vitality and his trademark wit.

Several symphonies are remembered by their colourful nicknames – almost always bestowed by audiences or publishers rather than by Haydn himself. The 'Surprise' (No. 94) quickly became a crowd favourite after the jarring *fortissimo* chord in its slow movement jolted listeners at the 1792 premiere. Symphony No. 100, the 'Military', stood out for its exotic Janissary percussion, while No. 103 was instantly recognisable by the timpani (pictured above) introduction that earned it the name 'Drumroll'. The steady tick-tock of Symphony No. 101's second movement inspired the moniker 'Clock'. And the 'Miracle' Symphony No. 96 owes its title to a historical confusion: the chandelier that crashed without injuring anyone actually fell during a performance of No. 102.



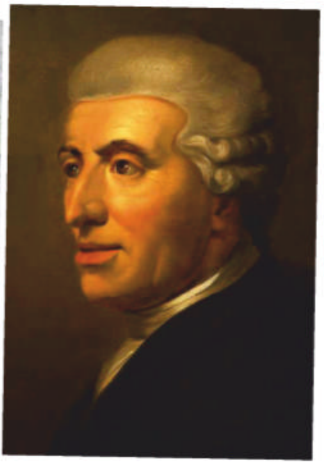
SALOMON'S CONCERT.

OPENING NIGHT.

We must of necessity be brief. And after all it may be best, when the *chef d'œuvre* of the great HAYDN is the subject.

"Come then, expressive SILENCE, muse his praise."

VIOTTI gave a Concerto, *simple* and *affecting*, like his genius. MARA sang *c'est assez dire*.



High praise: (above) *The Oracle* gives a glowing account of one of Haydn's (right) 1794 performances, supported by the German-born impresario Johann Peter Salomon

Haydn's music often spread without his consent. As Mathew explains, 'Many of his compositions travelled from the Esterházy court... in the form of clandestine duplications by unscrupulous music copyists.' In the 1760s and '70s, an 'almost completely unregulated new market for cheaper printed and hand-copied music' was emerging in cities like Paris and Amsterdam. Middlemen seized on Haydn's prominence and his massive output to make money, often through unauthorised copying. 'Haydn became obsessed with copyists making illicit copies for sale,' Mathew notes. 'It clearly happened a lot – it must have: how else did Dutch copies of string quartets appear in the 1770s?' The problem grew so serious that, by the 1780s, 'Haydn insisted on sitting in the room with the guy the entire time he copied.'

Yet, even as Haydn was discovering the extent of this phenomenon, as Mathew points out, 'He remained a novice when it came to promoting such exports and commanded few mechanisms for extracting value from them.'

In 1779, a crucial shift occurred. Though Haydn had tested the waters of publication before, his renegotiated Esterházy contract formally abolished the exclusivity clause, giving him the right to publish independently. The timing may not have been accidental. As a 2014 analysis speculates, 'The Prince appears to have tired of instrumental music, showing interest only in opera. With no sign that Haydn's inspiration had run dry, it is possible he proposed continuing to manage the opera system in exchange for permission to sell his instrumental music and keep the proceeds.'

With this new freedom, Haydn seized the market. His annual salary as Kapellmeister still hovered under 800 gulden, yet a single sale of six quartets to Artaria soon brought him more than half that sum. He expanded his reach by working with multiple publishers in different countries and tailoring editions for various audiences, even offering exclusive subscription copies to wealthy patrons willing to pay for their own scores.

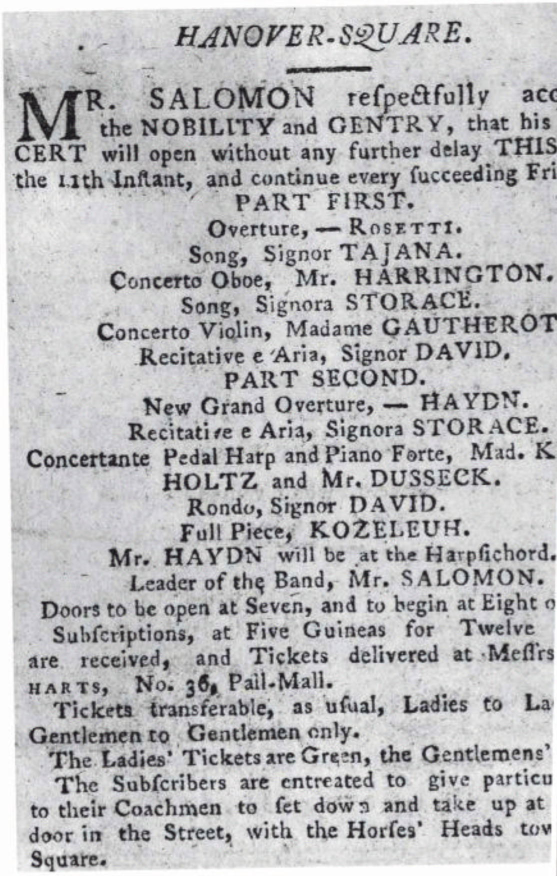
Still, the problem of piracy lingered. In 1781 he complained to the Artaria publishing house, 'The rascals put a piece of paper *a parte* under the music, and thus by degrees they secretly copy the part they have in front of them.' The practice was still cutting into his revenue stream, leaving Haydn exasperated that others were profiting from the very works that had made his name across Europe.

The decisive break came in 1790, when Nikolaus Esterházy died. His heir Anton largely dismantled the musical establishment, retaining Haydn on a reduced salary but freeing him from most duties. Into this vacuum stepped Johann Peter Salomon, a German-born impresario who had built a career in London. Breathlessly travelling to Vienna, he famously introduced himself: 'I am Salomon of London... and have come to fetch you.' Their agreement promised £300 for an opera, £300 for six symphonies, £200 for publication rights, £200 for 20 additional works, and £200 from a benefit concert – over £1,200 in total, a fortune compared with his Austrian earnings.

With Salomon's backing, Haydn arrived in London by New Year's Day 1791. His concerts at Hanover Square Rooms quickly sold out. That first season brought six symphonies, including the 'Surprise' Symphony. He composed with English tastes in mind: grander orchestration, striking contrasts and witty surprises.

By his second London stay in 1794–95, Haydn, now frequently hailed by the English press as the 'Shakespeare of composers', had perfected a sophisticated model for disseminating his music. This involved strategically timing premieres with publications, distributing editions across multiple markets and offering exclusive subscription versions to wealthy patrons eager for early access.

For audiences, this meant the guarantee of novelty and excellence. For Haydn, it meant



HANOVER-SQUARE.

MR. SALOMON reſpectfully acquaints the NOBILITY and GENTRY, that his CONCERT will open without any further delay THIS DAY, the 11th Inſtant, and continue every ſucceeding Friday.

PART FIRST.
Overture, — ROSETTI.
Song, Signor TAJANA.
Concerto Oboe, Mr. HARRINGTON.
Song, Signora STORACE.
Concerto Violin, Madame GAUTHEROT.
Recitative e Aria, Signor DAVID.
PART SECOND.
New Grand Overture, — HAYDN.
Recitative e Aria, Signora STORACE.
Concertante Pedal Harp and Piano Forte, Mad. KRUMPHOLTZ and Mr. DUSSECK.
Rondo, Signor DAVID.
Full Piece, KOZELEUH.
Mr. HAYDN will be at the Harpſichord.
Leader of the Band, Mr. SALOMON.

Doors to be open at Seven, and to begin at Eight o

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The Ladies' Tickets are Green, the Gentlemens'

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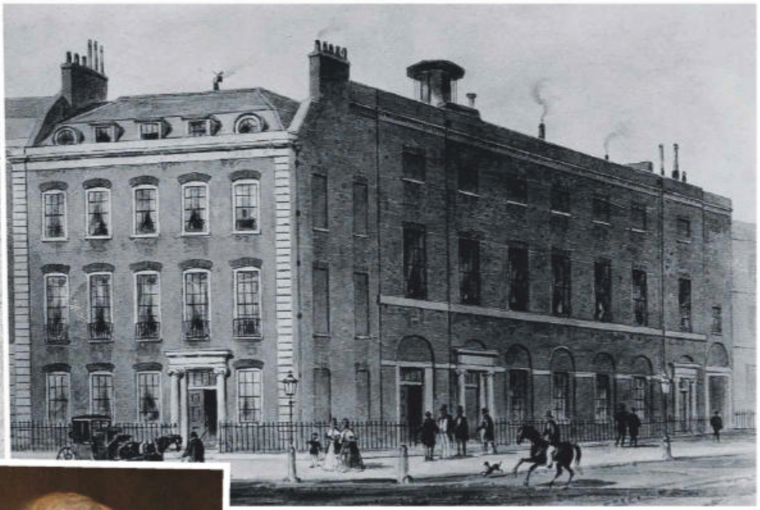
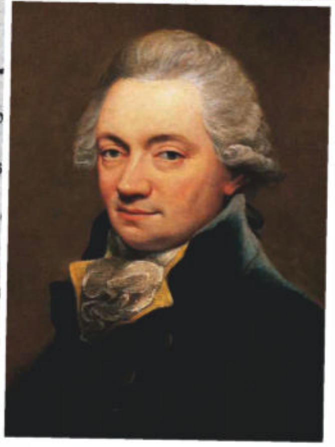
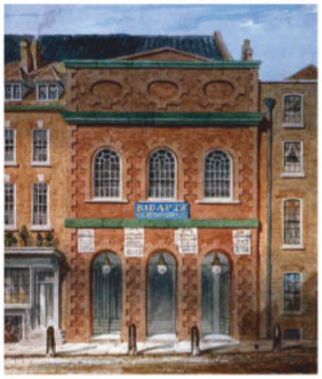






Introduced with a flourish: (far left) a programme for Haydn's first London concert, 1791, held at Hanover Square Rooms (above) and organised by Salomon (left); (below) King's Theatre, where the 1795 benefit took place

GETTY

relentless pressure. 'I have a lot to do, with all the concerts and opera, and I am persecuted the whole time by the subscription concerts,' he wrote from London in March 1791. 'Up to now our opera has not yet opened, and since the King won't give the license, Signor Gallini intends to open it as if it were a subscription concert, for if he doesn't, he stands to lose £20,000. I shan't lose anything, because the bankers Fries in Vienna have already received my money.'

The rivalry engineered by Salomon's competitors only heightened the drama. The professional concerts brought in Haydn's former pupil Ignaz Pleyel, setting up what many in London saw as a contest between master and student. Haydn admitted the toll: 'There isn't a day, not a single day, in which I am free from work… In order to keep my word, and to support poor Salomon, I must be the victim and work the whole time.' Yet he harboured no bitterness towards his former student, writing that, 'Pleyel's presumption is sharply criticised, but I love him just the same. I always go to his concerts, and am the first to applaud him.'

> 'There isn't a single day in which I am free from work. In order to keep my word, I must be the victim and work the whole time'

Haydn's stature in England was also cemented by a calculated act of prestige. In July 1791, at the suggestion of music historian Charles Burney, the University of Oxford awarded him an honorary Doctor of Music degree. As Landon notes, Haydn conducted his Symphony No. 92 at Oxford's Sheldonian Theatre during a week-long commemoration. 'He adored titles and ceremony,' Mathew observed. 'His Oxford doctorate was a huge deal for him. Yet another sign that he'd really made it… And, yes, it was also a marketing ploy. Why not advertise his status and academic imprimatur to everyone?'

Though outwardly Haydn admitted the ceremony was a bit overblown, he couldn't argue with its effects. 'I felt very silly in my gown, and I had to drag it around the streets for three whole days,' wrote Haydn in a letter. 'But I have much to thank for this doctor's degree in England; indeed, I might say everything; as a result of it, I gained acquaintance of the first men in the land and had entrance into the greatest houses.'

The 4 May 1795 benefit concert, capped by the 'London' Symphony, was the crowning achievement of this entrepreneurial vision. So great was his stature that King George III and Queen Charlotte offered him lodgings at Windsor Castle, hoping to make him their new Handel. For a man who had once lived in a garret, and later laboured under the exacting eye of Prince Nikolaus, the transformation could not have been more dramatic.

Haydn declined the royal invitation, returning to Vienna in August 1795 with financial independence secured. There, he would go on to compose *The Creation* and *The Seasons*, works whose scale and ambition reflected his newfound freedom. As his friend and biographer Georg August Griesinger later recalled, 'A new world was opened up to him, and he was enabled by generous profits at last to pull out of the limited circumstances in which he had grown old and gray.' In London, Haydn had become more than a composer – he had become a cultural icon, courted by kings and queens, and finally in command of his own fortune.

FIFTEEN OF NOTE

15 show-stealing moments

We take a look at the arias, movements, songs and dances whose fame has outshone the larger works in which they first appeared

WORDS: JEREMY POUND & STEVE WRIGHT ILLUSTRATION: DAVID LYTTLETON

However highbrow we think we are, we've all been guilty of it – that is, sitting in a concert or opera and waiting impatiently for 'the famous bit'. In some instances, that well-known moment may be just one of several in a work that is fairly familiar to us overall; in others, it can be the sole reference point in what is otherwise entirely unexplored territory.

Some of those famous bits have become so big that they have taken on a life of their own, often played as standalone pieces and inevitably known by a name that makes no reference to the larger work they came from. Having such a star moment within it doesn't necessarily condemn a work to obscurity; however, there are also plenty of examples where, while one part of a work enjoys the limelight, the rest sits unheard and unloved in a dark, forgotten corner. Let's take a look at a few examples...

1 Rimsky-Korsakov's The Flight of the Bumblebee

Whether at the hands of pianists, violinists or whoever, there has been a fad in recent years for playing this chromatic finger-twister as fast as possible, hence earning oneself a place in the *Guinness World Records*. Even taken at a sensible pace, this depiction of a prince turning into a bee so that he can fly over the sea to his father, takes about 80 seconds. That's around 105th of the length of the opera in which it features: 1900's *The Tale of Tsar Saltan*, which, sadly, rarely creates any other sort of buzz on the opera stage today.

2 JS Bach's Air on a G string

Bach originally set down the famous 'Air' as the second movement of his Orchestral Suite No. 3 for strings and continuo. It never acquired the famous nickname during his lifetime – rather, that was bestowed in 1871 by violinist August Wilhelmj, who arranged it for violin solo and transposed it down so the melody could be played entirely on the violin's lowest (G) string. This Romantic-era adaptation dialled up the piece's lyricism and warmth, at a stroke lending it the emotional resonance that would be lapped up by popular culture from weddings and lullabies to films and cigar adverts.

3 Chopin's Funeral March

Ask anyone to hum a funeral march and chances are that they will respond with Chopin's doom-laden tune, the default music for conjuring up images of the walk to the grave. Few, however, will go beyond the iconic eleven-note 'dum-dum-di-dum, dum-di-dum-di-dum-di-dum' and into the rest the *Marche funèbre – Lento* third movement of the Pole's Piano Sonata No. 2 of 1839, much of which is, in fact, quite serene. The other three movements, meanwhile, are a whirlwind of thrilling, if less familiar, virtuosity.

4 Elgar's Nimrod

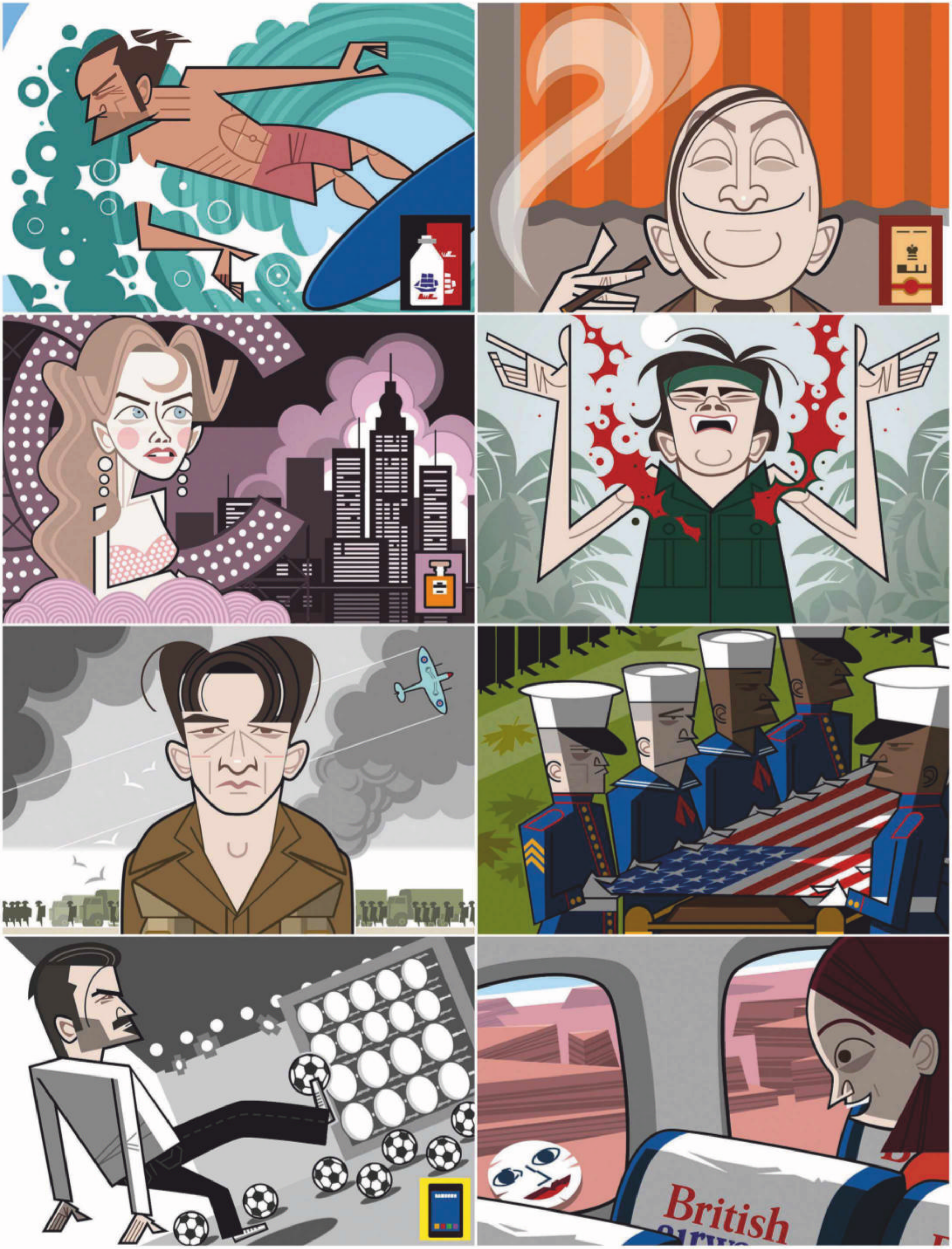
A regular at funerals, both royal and otherwise, 'Nimrod' is also guaranteed to bring a lump to the throat when played at Remembrance Day ceremonies. Elgar himself may have regarded the 13 friends depicted in his *Enigma Variations* with equal fondness, but it's Variation IX that outshines its peers in the popularity stakes today. Its association with death, incidentally, is entirely down to the solemn beauty of the music, as August Jaeger, Elgar's publisher and friend whom 'Nimrod' fondly portrays, was very much alive at the time of its composition.

5 Widor's Toccata

But enough of death. Widor's Toccata has a far cheerier association, as a piece thundered out by the organ as so many brides and grooms head together down the aisle and out into a world of wedded bliss. Or so we hope. How many of those newlyweds, however, know that the Toccata is just the blazing finale of the French composer's five-movement Symphony for Organ No. 5? Organ enthusiasts inevitably do, to be fair, as the Fifth Symphony is a masterpiece for the instrument, but even they rarely get the chance to hear it played in full.

6 Verdi's Drinking Song

'Libiamo ne' lieti calici' from *La traviata* is one of those moments that resonate far beyond the opera house. Bright, infectious and gloriously tipsy, the 'Drinking Song' is sung early on, as Alfredo and Violetta toast love, pleasure and the fleeting joys of life. The duet's waltz-like rhythm, playful call-and-response and sparkling melody make it instantly memorable – even for anyone who's never been near an opera. Ironically, the


British

scene's carefree exuberance only heightens the heartbreak to come – but that hasn't stopped the Drinking Song becoming Verdi's most jubilantly universal hit.

7 Delibes's Flower Duet

Thanks in part to British Airways adopting it as its theme tune, this serene melody brings to mind images of being whisked away to somewhere far-flung and glamorous. BA has chosen quite well here, as *Lakmé*, the 1882 opera that this duet for soprano and mezzo sets in motion, is set in exotic 19th-century India. Those who find themselves wanting to explore further into Delibes's magical world will discover similar delights throughout the ensuing three acts, though – spoiler alert – the ending may leave a bitter taste...

8 Puccini's 'Nessun Dorma'

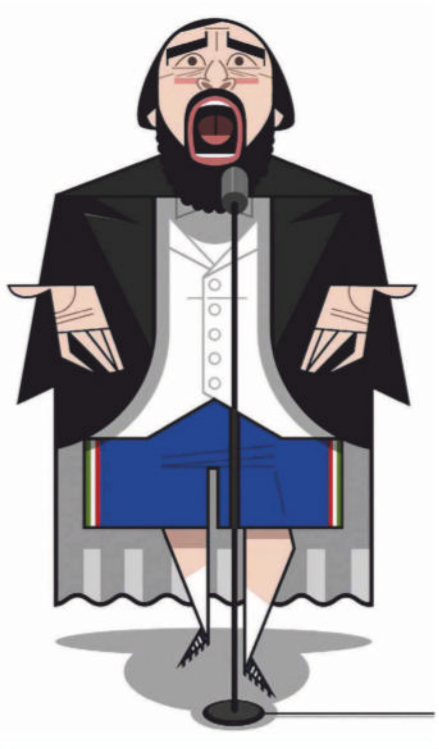
Think Pavarotti. Think Italia 90. Heralded by Puccini's aria, BBC TV's coverage of England's dramatic World Cup campaign gave classical music CD sales a huge boost. Hurray! And with its 'Vincero' (I will win!) climax, 'Nessun Dorma' does seem to conjure up a message of heroism and triumph. However, in its context in *Turandot*, there's a sinister subtext – when he sings it, Prince Calaf knows his own victory in keeping his name secret will result in Princess Turandot slaughtering her own people. Not so hurray.

9 Debussy's Clair de lune

Soft, shimmering, beautiful – this is as perfect a musical portrait of moonlight as you could wish for, its rippling arpeggios capturing the stillness of night with exquisite delicacy. No wonder, then, that it has soundtracked countless reveries and pensive moments in films and TV, including a sultry ad for a top-of-the-range perfume in 2004. In comparison, the whiff of popularity has eluded the other three movements of the *Suite bergamasque*, though all have their own quiet magic.

10 Orff's 'O Fortuna'

And talking of scents... This stirring opening (and closing) chorus of the 1936 cantata *Carmina Burana* still has many of us thinking of 1970s aftershave commercials rather than the 60 minutes of bawdy choral romp it introduces. In fact, with the possible exception of his charming 'Gassenhauer' for percussion, nothing else by the German composer has come even close to matching its fame.



With its 'Vincero' climax, 'Nessun Dorma' conjures up heroism and triumph

11 Beethoven's Ode to Joy

Composer of probably the most familiar four notes in classical music – the opening of his Fifth Symphony – Beethoven had another humdinger up his sleeve several years later. Like the Fifth, the Ninth Symphony gets plenty of outings in the concert hall, but it is the Ode to Joy that absolutely everyone knows. Setting Schiller's poem, this rousing climax hits home with an instantly hummable melody and a universal message of brotherhood, its triumphant strains having become shorthand for unity, joy and celebration.

12 Khachaturian's Sabre Dance

In 1942, as rehearsals for his recently completed *Gayane* began, Khachaturian sat back and looked forward to seeing his lushly orchestrated, folk-infused ballet about love and morality on a Soviet farm take shape on stage... only for the director to insist that another dance was needed. The composer dutifully and rapidly whipped up the energetic, sword-flashing 'Sabre Dance', but reckoned that *Gayane* would be fine without it. How ironic then, that today it's the Sabre Dance that thrives without the ballet.

13 Barber's Adagio

Barber's *Adagio for Strings* began life as the slow movement of his 1936 String Quartet, Op. 11, but soon eclipsed its parent work entirely. Transcribed for string orchestra, it found a unique emotional resonance – used in films (not least 1986's *Platoon*), memorials and moments of national mourning. Its aching simplicity and suspended harmonies speak directly to grief and transcendence. The rest of the quartet, though beautifully crafted, remains largely a footnote to this powerful elegy.

14 Parry's 'Long since in Egypt's plenteous land'

You're probably asking, 'What is this piece of music I have never heard of doing in a list of 15 famous moments?' But bear with us. Sung by Queen Meshullemeth as she tells her children how their forebears came to settle in Israel, this apparently little-known aria from Parry's equally unfamiliar 1888 oratorio *Judith* was later repurposed by Repton schoolteacher George Gilbert Stocks. Taking Parry's tune and combining it with poetry by John Greenleaf Whittier, Stocks brought to the world a hymn now loved by millions: *Dear Lord and Father of Mankind*.

15 Felix Mendelssohn's 'Vaterland, in deinen Gauen'

Composed to mark 400 years since the invention of the printing press, the cantata *Festgesang zur Eröffnung der am ersten Tage der vierten Säkularfeier der Erfindung der Buchdruckerkunst auf dem Marktplatz zu Leipzig stattfindenden Feierlichkeiten* is out of print these days. Still in circulation, though, is its 'Vaterland, in deinen Gauen' chorus, albeit usually sung lustily with words by Charles Wesley. Christmas just wouldn't be Christmas without *Hark! The Herald Angels Sing*, would it?

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NEW NATIONAL THEATRE, TOKYO

All together now

In recent years, more and more artists have invited audiences to sing along with their performances. Rebecca Franks investigates this growing trend

Jacob Collier is on stage with the Britten Sinfonia, in a packed-out concert hall. We've already been treated to a freewheeling, virtuosic and wildly joyful programme, ranging from Bob Dylan to scat-sung Bach, Fauré to Anna Meredith. But then the multi-instrumentalist does something different: he invites us all, in the audience, to sing. Turning to face us, he begins to conduct – raising his arm up and down to indicate whether we should sing higher or lower. Then, the crowd is split in two: we have harmony. Energy pulses through the auditorium. Even if you've sung in a choir before, there's something thrilling and magical about this simple act of an audience singing together.

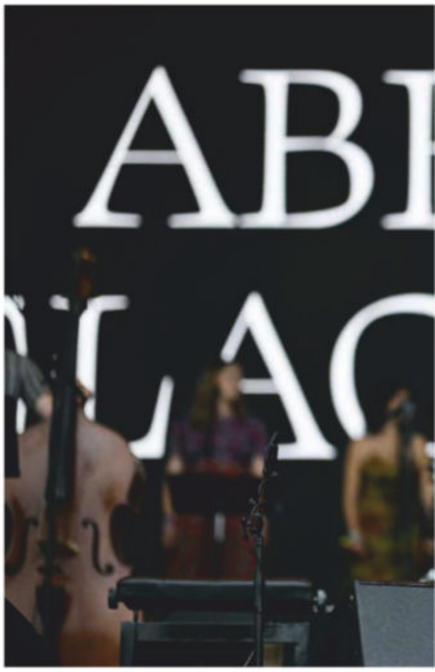
And Collier is far from the only musician who breaks the fourth wall. Violinist Pekka Kuusisto has made it one of his signatures, after he first included the Prommers in his Finnish folk encore at the Royal Albert Hall in 2016. Clarinettist Martin Fröst repeated the trick at this year's Proms, inviting the audience to sing the melody line to Gounod/Bach's *Ave Maria* while he himself virtuosically played the Bach Prelude accompaniment. When I heard violinist Rakhi Singh at a recent Manchester Collective gig, I was given a chance, along with my fellow concertgoers, to practise my mastery of folk-song rhythms. And cellist Abel Selaocoe writes the audience into the finale of his concerto *Four Spirits*, with a call-and-response section. In short, go to a classical concert nowadays, and you might find yourself being one of the performers.

There are plenty of reasons for this trend. The most obvious being that singing is good fun. Most people can sing (whether they're trained or not), it often makes us feel better, and singing together can create a powerful sense of community. 'It's so easy to be alone in our current climate, on your phone or closing your doors and watching TV,' says Selaocoe. 'A concert is so special – it gives people permission to get together, even if they don't know each other. Sometimes I go to concerts alone, but I don't feel alone – and that's an interesting thing. Music gives you permission to be part of a community without having to be in a WhatsApp group.'

> 'You're engaged and ready to participate; that changes the way you listen to music'

If going to a concert is one form of community, then singing together is the natural next step. Instinctively, we know that it can encourage social bonds: think of football chants, church hymns, school assemblies. Scientific researchers have backed this anecdotal observation. 'Singing fosters social closeness – even in large group contexts where individuals are not known to each other,' wrote the authors of a 2016 paper in *Evolution and Human Behaviour* which studied the impact of singing in small and large community choirs. A study in *Royal Society Open Science* took it even further and found that singing bonded groups more quickly than activities like creative writing. Which is perhaps why even singing together for a few minutes in a

Lift up your voice: Pekka Kuusisto (and below right) Martin Fröst get the audience singing at the Proms; (below) Abel Selaocoe communes with the crowd at Glastonbury Festival



ANDY PARADISE, CHRIS CHRISTODOULOU, GETTY

concert can leave a lasting impression long after the last note has been played.

The afterglow is worth mentioning, as one instance of singing along can impact a whole concert, making us more active listeners. Britten spoke of the 'holy triangle' of composer, performer and listener, as the key to the spark of live performance. But in the classical world, to speak in broad brushstrokes, listeners tend to sit in silence, clapping only at the ends of pieces. And while there's no shame in letting our brains unspool and muse on what's for dinner during a concert, active listening has plenty of rewards. Being invited to open our mouths and sing undoubtedly shifts the energy in a concert. People change after they sing. 'It's not only the singing they do in that moment, it's how they are afterwards and in what open ways they listen,' says Selaocoe. 'You're engaged and ready to participate, and I think it changes the way you listen to music entirely.'

Thrilling and magical: Jacob Collier turns the audience into a choir with Britten Sinfonia, Chris Thile and Suzie Collier at Bristol Beacon; (below) Rakhi Singh

But why has this become a particular trend in the last decade or so? It could well be related to societal and cultural shifts more generally. There's been a move to make classical concerts more inclusive, however that might be interpreted. 'It's a nice way of it feeling less formal, but I don't think it needs to happen all the time,' reflects Singh. 'But sometimes it's nice to get people involved, especially with things like rhythm. It's so innate – our heartbeats have a rhythm. So, helping people feel the rhythm in the body will hopefully enhance their experience.'

The rise of streaming playlists has been matched by eclectic live programmes, blending and blurring genres widely. Collier's Britten Sinfonia gig was a case in point. Often such concerts include pieces from traditions and cultures where taking part is more common. The Barokksolistene's raucous Alehouse Sessions, for instance, draw on 17th-century English music played in taverns, and their standing up, sell-out concerts involve energetic audience singing. For Selaocoe, his cultural heritage is a crucial part of his artistic identity. 'I take inspiration from South African hymns, because everything is made of call and response, and I ask the audience to be open to that,' he explains. 'They sing in a different language, and I tell them the meaning, and it becomes a beautiful learning experience for me and for them.'

JESSIE MYERS/SOUL MEDIA UK, ROBIN CLEWLEY, ASTRID ACKERMANN, GETTY

> 'It's nice to get people involved, especially with rhythm, which is so innate as our heartbeats have a rhythm. This can really enhance the experience'

And even when the concert isn't genre-blending or cross-cultural, perhaps we've also become more alert to the wide musical roots of the classical tradition. Speaking to *The Strad*, Kuusisto touched on this point. 'The encore from 2016 has become larger than life, but its original context was connected to the Tchaikovsky Violin Concerto I'd just played, whose finale contains elements of Russian traditional music. Tchaikovsky spent time in St Petersburg, which is the closest main Russian city to Finland. So, the folk song I chose comes from Karelia, a border area between Finland and Russia.'

Of course, bringing the audience on board can be something of a risk. Not least, given the status quo says that listeners are quiet, it requires a leap of faith from the performers, who can't say with any concrete certainty whether anyone will actually respond. 'There's a video online of our "Sirocco" shows [with the Manchester Collective] and the audience don't join in with much enthusiasm,' says Singh. 'Even though the concert was full of energy and went well. The camera pans round and you're like, "Oh…" But maybe people need to be in that context once or twice before they feel like they can join in.'

Selaocoe initially felt the pressure when he began including communal singalongs, but he doesn't anymore. 'If it ends up being me and one other person in the audience that can still

Silence, please: Ariana Grande at *Wicked*'s premiere, 2024

be special. If the masses don't join in, I don't feel it's invalid. And once one person does it, two people will, then four. It becomes a very non-judgemental space,' he says. 'If they don't [join in], because I'm an improvising musician, I've always tried to find ways to make that musically advantageous, and also use a bit of humour. And I tell them, this is not a concert – it's a gathering. Everybody's come from different situations to be in this room together. That's so special.'

Mind you, there are other potential pitfalls – as Singh found out during a recital in Germany. 'The Bach Chaconne has a bass line as its backbone, and I got the audience to hum it. I started playing and they were singing along quite loudly – and getting out of time with me. I thought, "Are they going to do this for 15 minutes?" I had to stop at the end of a phrase and very gently say, "Now, just do it in your head"'.

Audiences can go rogue in other ways, as other performing arts have found. Two years ago, the musical *The Bodyguard* hit the headlines after a theatre urged people to 'please refrain from singing along'. US cinemas were blunter. 'No singing. No wailing,' was an instruction given to cinemagoers during screenings of *Wicked*. Save for one notable occasion in 2021 when a young tenor in the audience joined in opera singer Lisette Oropesa's encore uninvited, classical audiences haven't yet got involved with unwelcome singalongs – though perhaps Beethoven's 'Ode to Joy' needs to watch out.

While I know I've always enjoyed being asked to sing in a concert, the acid test is surely whether performers like taking part when they're off-duty as regular punters. 'Yes, I do. I love it. It's never yielded a negative response for me,' says Selaocoe. 'Sometimes I sing for myself, sometimes I sing with others. We just enjoy the moment. It doesn't have to be more than that.'

One big collective

Participatory pieces

Thomas Arne Rule, Britannia *(1740)*
This 18th-century song wasn't written with the express intention of mass participation, but it's become a tradition – now controversial, thanks to the text's association with colonialism and slavery – that the crowd belts it out at the Last Night of the Proms.

Frederic Rzewski
Les Moutons de Panurge *(1969)*
The score asks 'any number' of musicians playing melodic instruments to play a single line in strict unison, while any number of 'nonmusicians' are also invited to make sound, 'preferably very loud'. It continues: 'Suggested theme for nonmusicians. "The left hand doesn't know what the right is doing."'

Huang Ruo The Sonic Great Wall *(2016)*
This immersive work for 13 musicians and audience takes its inspiration from The Great Wall of China and begins with a meditation session with the lights off and a minute in total darkness. The audience, which has a written part in the score, is invited to interact with the performers, making every performance of this piece different.

Cathy Milliken
Night Shift *(2021)*
Every audience member for *Night Shift* is given a 'wonderbag' which includes various sound-making objects, such as sheets of paper, stones, rattles and bells. 'It really is about everyone in the hall making music together… a huge democracy,' explains Milliken. 'It's about getting rid of that wall that's dividing.'

Flying the flag: (main) Prommers sing along to 'Rule, Britannia' at the Last Night of the Proms, 2012; (above) an audience member makes music with a foil 'instrument' at Cathy Milliken's *Night Shift* show

Abel Selaocoe Four Spirits *(2023)*
The final movement of this cello concerto (CD cover pictured below) is called 'Simunye', which means 'we are one', and the audience is written into the score. 'It's about being part of a community,' explains Selaocoe. 'Singing as a member of the community, not as a professional. Singing confirms you are part of a wonderful species. It celebrates our oneness and what we share using our voices.'

ABEL SELAOCOE
FOUR SPIRITS

Timed to perfection: Dame Joan Sutherland at her October 1990 Australian send off at the Sydney Opera House

The long goodbye

The farewell concert is a long-established tradition among classical stars. But, asks Andrew Green, how many musicians calling it a day actually mean it?

Dame Joan Sutherland managed things to her customary perfection: a gala goodbye before an adoring Covent Garden audience on New Year's Eve 1990, 35 years ago. Pavarotti and Marilyn Horne joined in the fun of the party scene from *Die Fledermaus*, and Dame Joan's husband, Richard Bonynge, directed in the pit. The celebrated soprano rounded things off with a tear-jerking rendering of 'Home! Sweet Home!' The following day, a new year, a fresh start. What a farewell! And the 64 year-old stressed her decision to retire was final: 'You can mend a violin and go on playing it, but not a voice. It doesn't work so well and there it is.' There would be no succession of Positively Last Appearances.

The danger of waiting too long to say cheerio? Maybe Dame Joan reflected on the sorry aural spectacle of Maria Callas's so-called 'Farewell Tour' in 1973/74 – recitals taking in Europe, North America and the Far East. After which, she sang in public no more, dying in 1977 aged only 53. During the tour it was plain her voice did not 'work so well'. It was 'careworn indeed' one London critic observed. Yes, a tour too far, musically speaking, but... it gave Callas's devoted admirers the opportunity to bid goodbye. At her first Royal Festival Hall concert, flowers rained in from all directions before she sang a note.

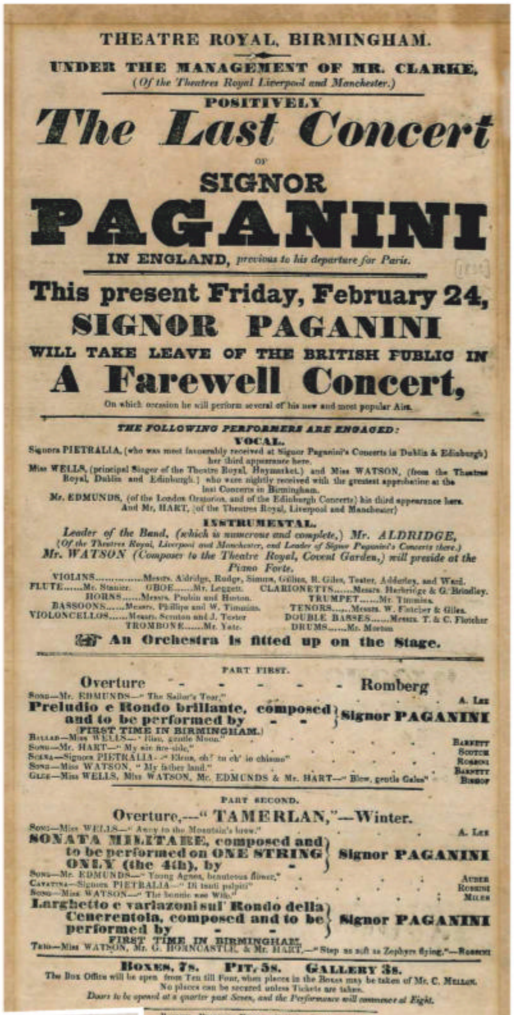
How far back in time does the idea of a farewell concert for a retiring artist take us? Hard to say, but at least as far as 1835. In April of that year, at London's Hanover Square Rooms, 64-year-old Johann Baptist Cramer played in public for the last time, in his case quitting while he was ahead. Today we associate his name with the eponymous music publishing company he founded, but back then Cramer was a famed virtuoso pianist – hugely admired, not least by Beethoven. And the *Atlas* newspaper was baffled 'that a man who has played all other players stark dead... should announce his intention of retiring'.

However, in Cramer's day the farewell concert in Britain was far more often a means of stirring public interest in musicians whose careers were ongoing. For much of the 19th century, announcing a 'farewell concert/appearance/recital' in any location was intended simply to boost ticket sales. Arrivals and departures carried far more significance and public interest in days when travel was a wearisome, time-consuming proposition. Which is why it often made sense to give several concerts in any one place, with a farewell concert to round things off.

> On her farewell tour, flowers rained in from all directions before Callas even sang a note

If the musician/musicians in question carried the mystique of coming from overseas – and maybe were shortly to return thither – farewell concerts were all the more meaningful to the paying public. At the end of his 1832 British tour, demonic violinist Niccolò Paganini drained every last drop of financial potency from the concept of farewell before flitting back to Europe. In August, the press advertised his 'Eighth and

GETTY, ALAMY



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Song—Mr. HART—"My ain fire-side," . . . . Scotch
Scena—Signora PIETRALIA—"Elena, oh! tu ch' io chiamo" . . . . Rossini
Song—Miss WATSON, "My father land." . . . . Barnett
Glee—Miss WELLS, Miss WATSON, Mr. EDMUNDS & Mr. HART—"Blow, gentle Gales" . . Bishop

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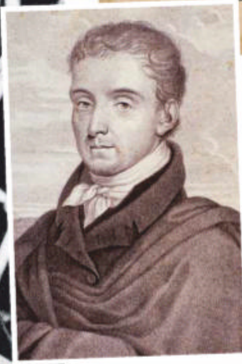
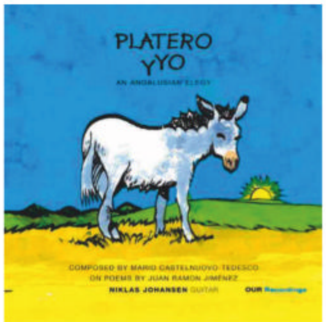


A final farewell?: (above) a poster for one of Paganini's many 'last' concerts; (left) pianist Johann Baptist Cramer set the trend for official goodbye concerts

positively his farewell concert in London'. Yet not long after, Paganini announced his 'Eleventh and farewell concert'. Even then, said the *Morning Herald*, 'it would evince a degree of temerity to express an opinion that this was in good truth the Signor's final farewell'.

Equally, a performer simply moving on to the next (often not far distant) stop on a UK tour would find his or her musical goodbye prominently advertised as such. Farewell concerts were nonetheless deployed in other contexts. They might waft members of the armed forces on their way to fresh deployments, or mark retirements from all manner of professions. One intriguing find in the newspaper record, from 1826, is of the 'celebrated songstress' Miss Goodall giving a farewell concert (staged in London) because she was getting married – or, as was said, forsaking


PLATERO
Y YO
AN ANDALUSIAN ELEGY
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ON POEMS BY JUAN RAMÓN JIMÉNEZ
NIKLAS JOHANSEN GUITAR
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Among the great works in guitar literature is Castelnuovo-Tedesco's *Platero y Yo*, a 28-part cycle based on poems by Nobel laureate Juan Ramón Jiménez, written for Andrés Segovia. Danish multi award-winning guitarist Niklas Johansen recorded the full 1 hour and 49-minute work in the stunning acoustics of Fredensborg Palace Chapel, with permission from King Frederik X. The album includes English translations of the poems and striking illustrations by award-winning artist Halfdan Pisket, created especially for this release. Recorded in DXD and available in Dolby Atmos.

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- to be, or
not to be...
Elena Firsova:
- Four Seasons
- Quartet for
the Time of
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GRAMOPHONE *Editor's choice*

Digital EP

Carl Nielsen
Clarinet Concerto
LIVE
FROM
TIVOLI
Jonas Frølund, clarinet
Adam Fischer, conductor
Danish Chamber Orchestra
OUR Recordings

★★★★★★*"...absolutely magnificent. Agile, supremely virtuosic, and with the presence of mind to communicate as if the concert were a piece of theatre, he brought the music into a new era. Fischer is a world-class conductor. When he's not in Copenhagen, he's leading the great orchestras of Vienna and New York. He made the Danish Entertainment Orchestra play with a sweep and intensity worthy of the Vienna Philharmonic. Wow*!" **Thomas Michelsen, Politiken (DK)**

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Away we go: Maria Callas at Carnegie Hall on her farewell tour of 1974: (right) Clara Butt at Southampton dock on one of her celebrated returns

'the shrine of Apollo for that of Hymen'. An act of surrender expected of many a new wife, given expectations within British society circles.

A whole new dimension to 'farewelling' came with the developing revolution in transport, on land and sea. Farewell concerts could still denote a departure for another location, but on a far grander – even global – scale. The idea of a nationwide farewell by a star name about to depart on a foreign concert tour was much easier to deliver, supported by ever more sophisticated publicity and promotion. Clearly, such royal progresses boosted bank balances. No British musician exploited the possibilities more than the huge-in-voice, huge-in-stature contralto Clara Butt. Her forthcoming absences for extended periods overseas in the early 20th century prompted goodbye performances around the UK. Plenty of farewell concerts during the foreign tours themselves, of course... and then (you guessed), cash registers would ring as Colossal Clara's return to Britain was celebrated in a series of 'welcome home' gigs.

So it was also now possible for musicians to round off their stellar careers via home-and-abroad farewell tours. Adored tenor John McCormack enjoyed spectacular (and highly remunerative) final trips round both the US and the British Isles in the late 1930s. The climax was a 1938 Royal Albert Hall ballad concert, with 8,000 in the audience, that's the proverbial stuff of legend. At his arrival onstage, applause burst (said the *Daily Herald*) 'like a tropical hailstorm on a glass roof'. The *Daily Mirror* headline read: 'McCormack Sang Goodbye As Women Wept.' The 54 year-old's goodbye speech referenced words from a Frederick O'Connor song: ''Tis time I was moving, 'tis time I passed on.' 'No, no!' bellowed the audience. And in fact, the Second World War brought McCormack out of retirement to help boost morale.

By the time we get to Luciano Pavarotti's global farewell tour, starting in 2005, the jet aircraft had long been making possible a more ambitious continent-crossing itinerary, with commercial/merchandising strategies plotted to capitalise on the spectacle. However, having triumphed in Australian and Far East venues, Pavarotti fell ill in the summer of 2006 on reaching the South Africa leg, and the singing stopped for good. The truly global farewell was the 'singing', earlier in 2006, of his trademark 'Nessun dorma' at the opening of the Winter Olympics in Turin. Alas, Pavarotti merely mimed to a pre-recorded track.

Which brings us to the point that this topic is littered with stories of how illness has intervened to prevent great musicians from bidding an 'official' and appropriate farewell. The desire to keep performing into old age means that often it's been left to the grim reaper to call a halt. Take the great guitarist Andrés Segovia. At age 94 he had no desire to retire ('There will be plenty of time to rest in eternity') but was taken ill on his 1987 US tour and never performed again. Legendary maestros such as Leonard Bernstein and Herbert von Karajan died 'in harness', as did Yehudi Menuhin, expiring in 1999 (aged 82) in the middle of a European conducting tour.

Maestro Arturo Toscanini managed to say farewell by the skin of his teeth, announcing

Set in stone

In his late sixties, Sergei Rachmaninov planned a final recital tour but then was unable, on account of rapidly advancing illness, to stay the course. What turned out to be his farewell recital – at the University of Tennessee in Knoxville – is memorialised in a sculpture which stands in Knoxville's World's Fair Park. The work of Victor Bokarev, this shows Rachmaninov standing at a representation of a keyboard, head bowed. A unique tribute to a farewell?

GETTY, THD3/WIKIMEDIA COMMONS

'Tis time I was moving: John McCormack at his 1938 Royal Albert Hall farewell; (right) Gerald Moore rehearses for his big send off with singers Fischer-Dieskau, Schwarzkopf and de los Ángeles, 1967

HOMAGE TO GERALD MOORE
VICTORIA DE LOS ANGELES
DIETRICH FISCHER-DIESKAU
ELISABETH SCHWARZKOPF

Recorded farewells

With easy access to recordings, a virtuoso performer's farewell concert need never be a final goodbye. For some farewell recordings, see...

Bernard Haitink *conductor*
Bruckner Symphony No. 7
Vienna Philharmonic Orchestra (Unitel 802304)

Janet Baker *mezzo-soprano*
Gluck *Orfeo ed Euridice*
Glyndebourne, recorded 1982 (Opus Arte OA1372D)

Gerald Moore *piano*
A Tribute to Gerald Moore
Including 1967 farewell concert (Warner 567 9902)

Alfred Brendel *piano*
Alfred Brendel: The Farewell Concerts
Vienna Philharmonic/ Charles Mackerras, recorded December 2008 (Decca 478 2116)

GETTY

his retirement in a letter read out to the audience at his NBC Symphony Orchestra concert on 29 March 1954: 'Now the sad time has come when I must reluctantly lay aside my baton.' Toscanini's conducting of Wagner that night demonstrated his frailty. At least he was spared the plight of opera star Leonard Warren, who in 1960 collapsed and died at The Met in New York during Verdi's *La forza del destino*. With piquant timing, Warren had just sung Don Carlo's Act III aria, starting, 'To die, a momentous thing'.

> 'Now the very sad time has come when I must reluctantly lay aside my conducting baton'

It's nonetheless heartwarming in a way that some greats have chosen to make light of their withdrawal from performing. Baritone Dietrich Fischer-Dieskau, for example, retired after being just one participant in a Munich gala for conductor/pianist Wolfgang Sawallisch in 1992. And mezzo Janet Baker gave no designated 'farewell recital', although a few years previously much was made of her goodbyes to the stage at English National Opera and Glyndebourne.

Two favourite farewell concerts to leave you with. Firstly, for a musician who spent his career not in the spotlight, but as supporting artist to some of the greatest singers of the 20th century. When pianist Gerald Moore called it a day in 1967, famed impresario/record producer Walter Legge masterminded a sell-out farewell concert at the Festival Hall with Moore playing for the gold-plated trio of Elisabeth Schwarzkopf, Victoria de los Ángeles and Dietrich Fischer-Dieskau. The singers led the applause as Moore made his way to the piano. 'I turned to the public,' Moore recalled, 'and to my everlasting wonder… they were all on their feet.' Moore's page-turner that evening, Robert Sutherland, recalled Moore's fingers trembling as he played, on his own, one final number (Schubert's *An die Musik*). 'When he came off his eyes were wet.' The recording of the concert was a hit, thanks to the two sopranos' hilariously 'miaowist' rendering of Rossini's so-called 'Cat's Duet'.

And finally, there's the 1930 concert in London which drew famed soprano Dame Nellie Melba from her native Australia to sing one last time. What persuaded her was not some grandiose musical love-in, but an event (OK, at the glitzy Park Lane Hotel) to raise funds for a charity which was close to Melba's heart – the National Children's Adoption Society. 'Numberless waifs and strays,' she said, 'are still abandoned on doorsteps and my keen desire for the success of the Society's work is what has persuaded me to sing again.' After this final chirrup, Melba was called to the platform repeatedly to receive ecstatic applause. She died the next year.

Before I myself depart… the most eloquent final words expressed at a farewell concert? This has to be Jascha Heifetz after his October 1972 violinistic goodbye: 'I'm pooped.'

And I'm done. Farewell… for now.

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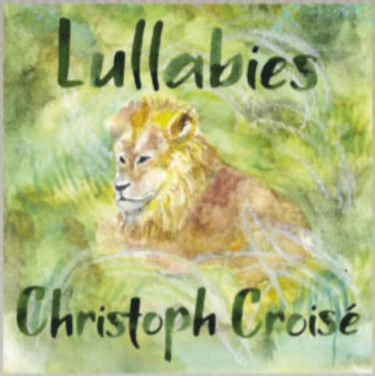
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Following the success of “Lullaby for Arthur” (from Cello Sonata No. 1, Op. 9), Christoph Croisé has composed four new Lullabies to form a brand-new Op. 18 set culminating in a 5-track EP release in November 2025: to include all four new compositions, plus his celebrated “Lullaby for Arthur” to complete the programme.

THE ORCHESTRA NOW

Transcription as Translation, the latest release from The Orchestra Now and their founder-conductor Leon Botstein, brings together two rarely heard orchestrations: Felix Weingartner’s of Beethoven’s “Hammerklavier” Piano Sonata, and George Szell’s of Smetana’s string quartet, “From My Life”.

CONCORDIAN DAWN

New York-based early music ensemble Concordian Dawn presents *Veni Redemptor Gentium*, a joyful and introspective celebration of the Christmas season centred around songs from the 13th – 15th centuries, plus two world-premiere recordings of works by Australian-born composer David Yardley.

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All aboard!

Clare Stevens joins the intrepid presenters of Radio 3 for a day of remarkable on-the-move broadcasting, travelling the length of the United Kingdom by train

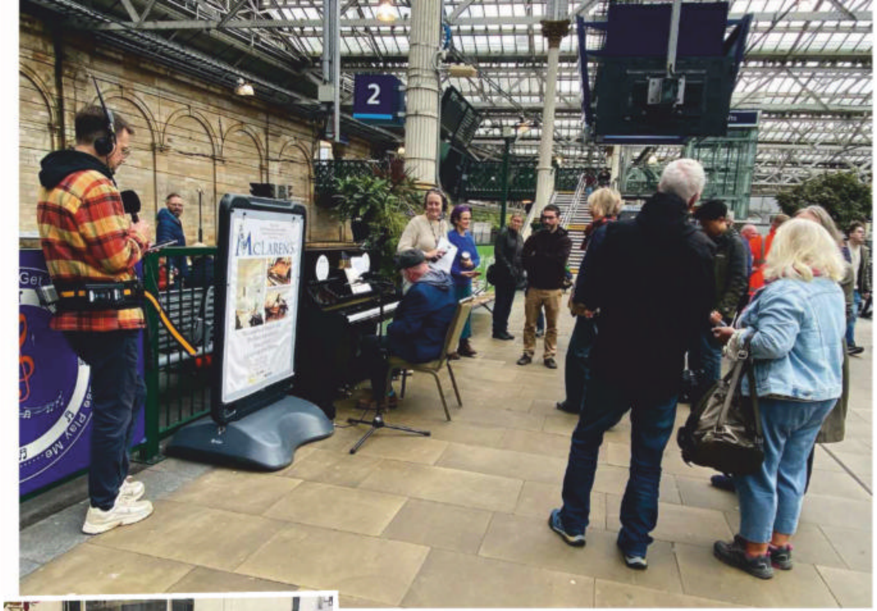
An all-day radio broadcast from a train travelling down the length of Britain (almost) from the Highlands of Scotland to London – that was how BBC Radio 3 celebrated the 200th anniversary, on Saturday 27 September, of the day the first-ever passenger train travelled from Shildon, via Darlington, to Stockton in northeast England.

Train Tracks was anchored by Petroc Trelawny from the 7.55am London North Eastern Railway (LNER) service from Inverness – chosen for the broadcast because at 581 miles it's one of the longest journeys you can take in the UK on one train. Four colleagues presented shows from stations along the way, featuring a mix of live performances, interviews and recordings of music relating to railways: Tom Service at Pitlochry; Tom McKinney at Waverley Station, Edinburgh; Elizabeth Alker in Darlington; and Georgia Mann at London King's Cross.

'This I've got to see,' I thought when I read Radio 3 controller Sam Jackson's preview of the event in the September issue of *BBC Music Magazine* and realised that I would be travelling home to Wales from Scotland the same weekend. Could I travel part of the way on Petroc's train?

Well, yes, I could, but it wouldn't be a very interesting experience as Petroc and his team would be ensconced in a separate carriage – a 'Faraday cage' designed to minimise electrical interference. He wouldn't be walking up and down the train chatting to passengers. Much better to join one of the other presenters on a station, hear the musical performances and see the Highland Chieftain pulling in at the appointed time with Petroc on board.

CLARE STEVENS, BBC



Inverness Depot

Action stations: (main pic) Tom Service and Petroc Trelawny at Pitlochry; (left) Neil Brand performs at Waverley; (below left) bookshop manager Bobbie McGraw; (below right) with Georgia Mann at King's Cross; (bottom) at Inverness Depot

So, at a much earlier hour than usual on a Saturday, I found myself switching on Radio 3 in my room at Fisher's Hotel, Pitlochry to listen to Petroc setting the scene at Inverness Station and being piped on board the London train.

While I had travelled the previous day from the architecturally celebrated Wemyss Bay station on the Clyde coast, Petroc had taken the Caledonian Sleeper from London and spent a day in Inverness, presenting his early evening show *In Tune* from the Royal Highland Hotel, one of the large Victorian establishments that sprang up at major stations in response to the development of train travel. There, he was joined by performers representing the musical traditions of the Highlands: a folk group led by singer and multi-instrumentalist Julie Fowlis; Karen Marshalsay demonstrating three types of Scottish harp; and the voices of Lochaber, Taynuilt, Oban and Nairn Gaelic choirs.

I had serendipitously booked myself into another railway hotel – an historic Visitors Book on show in the lounge of Fisher's displayed the names of prime minister William Gladstone and his family, and the philanthropist Andrew Carnegie. A two-minute walk across the hotel garden after breakfast took me to Platform 1 of Pitlochry Station. It was still quite quiet, but on the opposite platform Tom Service, kitted out with radio antenna, microphone and a belt full of power packs, was 40 minutes into his segment of the *Train Tracks* broadcasts.

A few minutes later, nursing hot water bottles under their jumpers, fiddler Patsy Reid and cellist Alice Allen, aka The Strathspey Queens, emerged from the waiting room which they'd been using as a green room to perform a selection of Scottish dance tunes and chat to Tom about their 'bi-lingual' careers as classically trained musicians breathing new life into 18th-century folk melodies such as 'Mrs Forsyth's Strathspey' and 'Easter Elchies'. 'I've stood on many a station platform with my cello, but I've never got it out of its case before,' Allen admitted.

> They snatched a *Brief Encounter*-style chat on the platform before the train headed off

Meanwhile in the station bookshop, manager Bobbie McGraw was telling her first customers how she'd shown Tom round the well-stocked shelves – railway-themed titles are understandably to the fore at the moment, but she has a good music section too and is hugely proud of the £480,000 raised for six charities since the shop opened in 2005.

As Platform 1 began to fill up with passengers for the London-bound train, it became apparent that some were thrilled to be sharing their journey with Radio 3, others baffled by the live music and increasing activity. An array of iPads and phone cameras filmed Tom and the musicians from across the tracks; other travellers chose to clamp their phones to their ears as they trundled their cases to their boarding points.

Then it was time for the radio crew to switch platforms and prepare for Petroc's arrival. The train was running a little late… no it wasn't… yes it was… station officials urged spectators back behind the yellow line… and at 9.31am the Highland Chieftain glided calmly in. It's worth scrolling through Radio 3's Instagram feed to enjoy the filmed moment when Petroc and Tom made audio contact via their headsets, saw each other through the train windows, then snatched a *Brief Encounter*-style chat on the platform before Petroc jumped back on board. ▶

THE
PUMP ROOM

Taking the waters: Bath Pump Room

Out and about

BBC Radio 3 on the move

Radio 3's *Train Tracks* followed on from a number of road and river trips made by the station, most of them focused on the natural environment. A midsummer exploration of forests in 2018 took the weekday *Breakfast* programme to Tollymore in Northern Ireland, Glen Affric in Scotland, Gwydyr in Wales and Sherwood and the New Forest in England. The following year Petroc Trelawny presented the programme from five locations on the Severn, Britain's longest river, with live performances including the Jackfield Brass Band playing at Ironbridge Gorge, as part of a week celebrating rivers as a source of inspiration for artists, writers and composers.

Subsequent years have seen *Breakfast* travelling coast to coast in Scotland, following the Rivers Ure and Ouse to the Humber in Yorkshire, visiting five Northern Irish loughs and journeying across the north east of England as a prelude to the BBC Proms at Gateshead, and across the Cotswolds en route to this year's Bristol Proms. Atmospheric dawn broadcasts have included many windswept beaches and opportunities to 'take the waters' in more ways than one, from using a hydrophone (an underwater microphone) to listen to the sound of the sea or a fountain, to sampling the mineral waters at the Pump Room in Bath.

CLARE STEVENS, GETTY, BBC

SEATS
04
-
20
FIRST
CLASS

Travelling mic: (above) Tom Service interviews The Strathspey Queens; (right) Petroc Trelawny takes his leave

While I found myself a seat a couple of carriages back, Tom's programme continued with a visit to the Pitlochry Festival Theatre and an interview with its recently-appointed artistic director, the actor Alan Cumming. But I couldn't hear that because, as Petroc pointed out in a *Radio Times* interview about *Train Tracks*, 'The world's leading brand of smartphone has got rid of headphone sockets,' and I don't have wireless ear buds (please don't write in recommending brands I should try!) So, I settled down to enjoy the views of peat-dark trout streams, pine-clad hillsides and fertile farmland until we approached the outskirts of Edinburgh nearly two hours later.

> A miniature cupboard behind the trolley park at Waverley served as one improvised studio

Witnessing the meet-up between Petroc and Tom McKinney as we arrived at Waverley proved challenging, as my nearest exit door also served the cycle carriage and I had to wait for a couple of fellow travellers to lift their bikes off before I could get out with my case. The meet-up wasn't smooth for Tom either, as he had to race up a crowded platform to greet Petroc at the door of carriage M and join him in admiration of the Edinburgh skyline. There was just time for Petroc to congratulate train manager Tommy Shannon, who was just going off shift, for looking after the team so well on the first leg of their journey before the doors began to beep and off they went again.

On the main station concourse, author, composer and pianist Neil Brand was waiting to talk about and play extracts from some railway-themed film scores. Tom also interviewed Heather Waugh, until recently Scotland's only woman freight train driver, and another violin and cello duo, Alice Rickards and Sonia Cromarty, who played two short sets including 'Hogganfield Loch', a movement from a suite written for them by Aileen Sweeney as Glasgow University's 2024 McEwen Bequest chamber music commission. At one o'clock Neil played the programme out with a spectacular improvisation, Elizabeth Alker took over the presenter's mic down in Darlington and I headed for home down the west coast line via Crewe.

If you heard *Train Tracks* live or on catch-up, you'll know that all did not go quite according to plan for the Radio 3 team after that, as an incident on the mainline track meant the Highland Chieftain had to divert to a slower route along the Durham coast, and wasn't able to stop in Darlington. As lead producer Alex Anderson of Tandem Productions, which made *Train Tracks* on behalf of Radio 3, commented afterwards, 'The way Petroc pivoted and improvised on the fly was something to behold.' A last-minute platform change meant another on-air drama worthy of *The Railway Children*, captured on film by Georgia Mann as she ran through King's Cross in search of her colleague in order to do the final meet-up and bring an extraordinary day of broadcasting to a close.

As an observer I was in awe of how the presenters, producers and sound engineers did their jobs so well from improvised studios that included a tiny cupboard behind the trolley park at Waverley, chatting to passers-by when they were off air, skilfully counting down each time slot, putting the musicians who were about to play at their ease and thanking them warmly before moving on to the next guest. It was a real tour de force – I'm so glad I can say 'I was there' for part of it!

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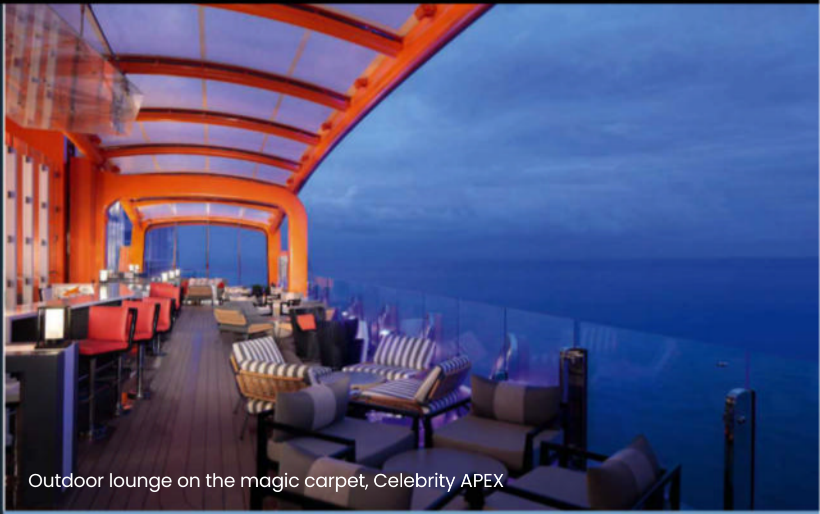


Outdoor lounge on the magic carpet, Celebrity APEX

Celebrity APEX

Winner takes all

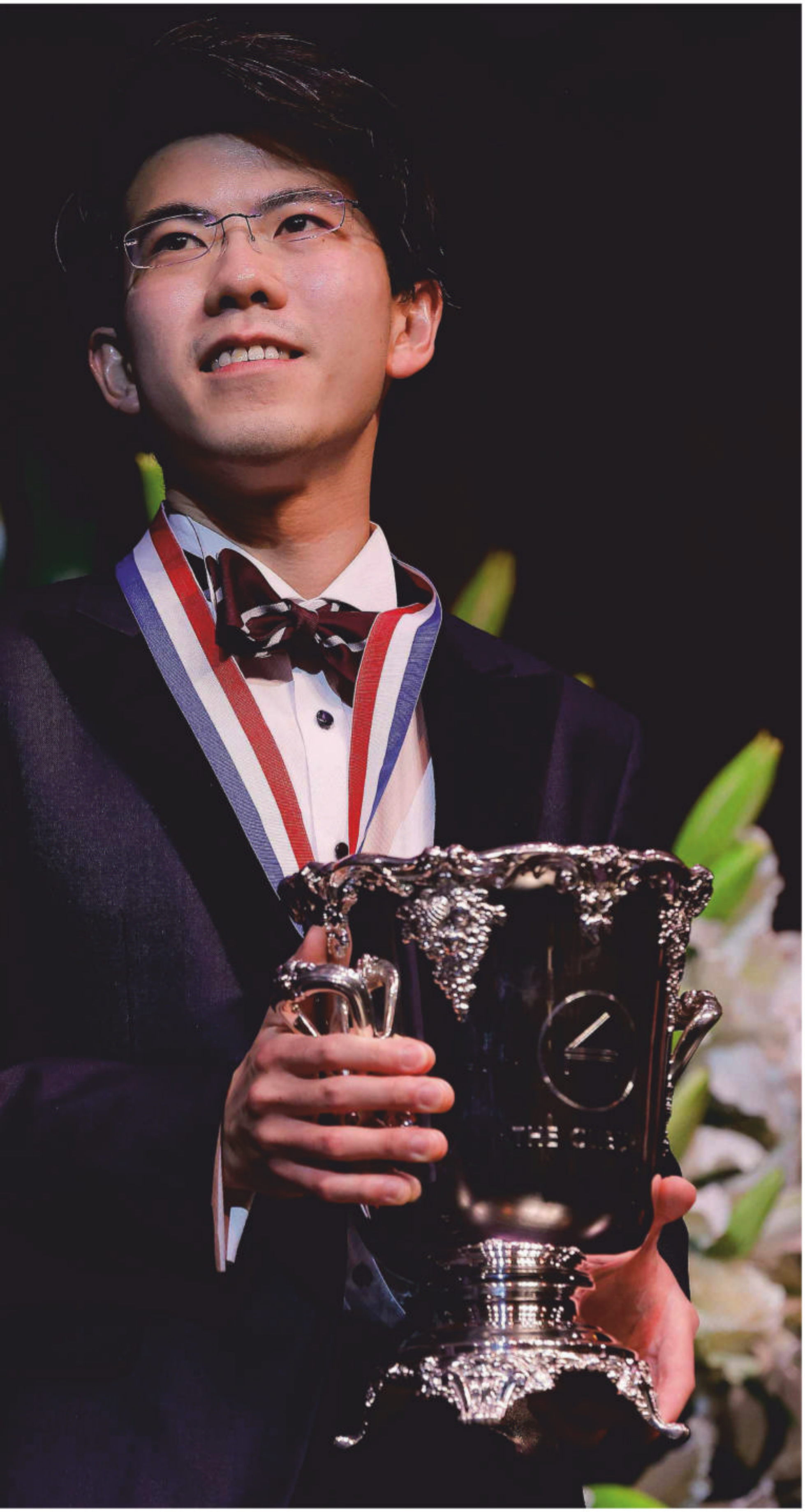
Competitions may be 'for horses', as Bartók once claimed, but they're a useful promotional tool, writes Claire Jackson, and sometimes they reveal a real star

At a glance, the young pianist appears frozen in time, a still portrait quite at odds with the dancing carnival of sound that fills the KKL Luzern. The months pass by, and February's ebullience bows to an August harvest: in Yunchan Lim's hands, Tchaikovsky's *Seasons* reveal a deeper cyclical wisdom. Lucerne's Le Piano Symphonique – Switzerland's musical Toblerone, with grandee Martha Argerich at its peak – welcomes the best pianists in the world, and Lim, just 21, is one of them. After the recital, fans flock to bestow cuddly toys upon the Korean wunderkind.

The industry soon followed, with Lim's debut album (Chopin Études on Decca) winning three BBC Music Magazine Awards in 2025 (Recording of the Year, Newcomer of the Year and the Instrumental Award – the first time a single album has received three awards in one helping since the ceremony's inauguration in 2006, and the first time a Newcomer award winner has also received Recording of the Year). Yet until recently, Lim was virtually unknown, quietly living out of the spotlight while he studied at the Korea National University of Arts. Then came his participation in the 2022 Van Cliburn International Piano Competition in Texas, where his pianism attracted more than the gold medal – Lim's performance of Rachmaninov's Third Piano Concerto is now the most-watched version of that work online, with more than 17m views. He has management, a recording label, concert schedule, publicity – all while still a student, now at the New England Conservatory of Music in Boston.

RALPH LAUER, BRANDON WADE

Lim's experience is what drives musicians towards competitions. Solo careers are as rare as rocking-horse dung, dependent on playing to the right people at the right time. A high-profile competition is an efficient, if highly stressful, showcase. It's economical, too, for industry insiders, who have the benefit of expert jurors to help make distinctions missed in a common-or-garden recital. But, to invoke Goveian folklore, sometimes people have had enough of experts, and a competition's audience prize – often voted by those who have been following the rounds as closely (or perhaps more closely: it is not unheard of for a juror to fall asleep as they listen to their fifth Scriabin sonata) – tends to give a better idea of what the public actually want.



Man of the people: Aristo Sham won this year's Van Cliburn International Piano Competition, plus the Audience Award; (far left) Yunchan Lim, with Marin Alsop, was the hugely popular Van Cliburn winner in 2022

This is particularly true of the Van Cliburn competition ('the Cliburn'), whose audience extends far beyond those watching from Fort Worth's Bass Performance Hall. Every performance is livestreamed – this year's simulcast had 20m views across 145 countries – and all are available via Apple Music Classical, along with curated playlists, a 'Cliburn Keys View' option to watch a hands-only perspective, and 'Cliburn Score & Sound', with recital performances available to watch a short time after the event with synced scores. The latest gold medallist, Aristo Sham – a former child star (featured on Channel 4's 2009 documentary *The World's Greatest Musical Prodigies*) who studied economics at Harvard and music at Juilliard – received $100,000 (£74,000) and took the Audience Award by more than 9,000 votes. Such consensus is not guaranteed, and tales of jury fallouts are legendary, none more than Argerich's resignation from the International Chopin Piano Competition in 1980 in protest over the elimination of Ivo Pogorelić in the third round. Although impressive, Sham was not the press pack's favourite, and this win was a surprise to some of us – once again proving the unpredictability of competitions.

> 'I prepared two hours of recital repertoire, as well as chamber music and concertos'

Participants are often described as having been on a 'journey', a mawkish description that somewhat undermines the intense work involved. Inevitably they have been on a physical journey – the last Cliburn event received 340 applications from 45 countries – and finessed multiple recitals and concertos, the latter only to be played if they make it to the finals. 'I prepared about two hours of recital programmes, as well as chamber music and concertos, covering a wide range of styles from Baroque to contemporary,' says Manami Suzuki, who in 2024 became the first-ever female winner of Japan's Hamamatsu International Piano Competition, taking 4m yen (just over £20,000) and winning a concert tour (including a recital at Kings Place, London in January). Long days demand resilience – and the ability to expect the unexpected. That was the case in 2019 at the Tchaikovsky Competition when Tianxu An prepared to play that

Popular appeal: Van Cliburn with Khrushchev in 1958

Reality check

Competitions and media

Sometimes, the noise around a participant is louder than the music. Harvey Lavan 'Van' Cliburn's win at the inaugural Tchaikovsky Competition in 1958 is remembered for the pianist's glorious performances, and for the effect he had on listeners, with supporters affectionately calling him 'Vanyusha'.

Competition fever heightened as events moved to the television studio, with BBC Young Musician of the Year appearing on screens in 1978. Many winners – such as Nicholas Daniel (1980), Jennifer Pike (2002) and Peter Moore (2008) – have gone on to be stalwarts of the industry.

And it's not just classical competitions that launch careers: in 2004, a quartet of Guildhall graduates came second on *The X Factor*, going on to enjoy success as singing group G4. It laid the path for the Kanneh-Mason siblings, who reached the semi-finals of *Britain's Got Talent* in 2015 – a useful warm-up for cellist Sheku, who won BBC Young Musician the following year.

There's greater audience access to participants than ever before – the Leeds Competition now streams its rounds via YouTube, and the Queen Elisabeth Competition has just made 600 videos available on its website. Even if you're not officially on a reality TV programme, unofficially you are.

COURTESY OF HAMAMATSU INTERNATIONAL PIANO COMPETITION

Proud moments: (right) Hamamatsu International Piano Competition winner Manami Suzuki, with jury chair Noriko Ogawa, celebrate success in 2024; (below) Pavarotti's choir performs at Llangollen International Eisteddfod, 1955; returning with his father, 1995; programme from 1955

composer's First Piano Concerto. Unfortunately, an administrative error meant that the orchestra was prepped for Rachmaninov's *Rhapsody on a Theme of Paganini* and the soloist missed his entry. The unfortunate An was eventually awarded a special prize.

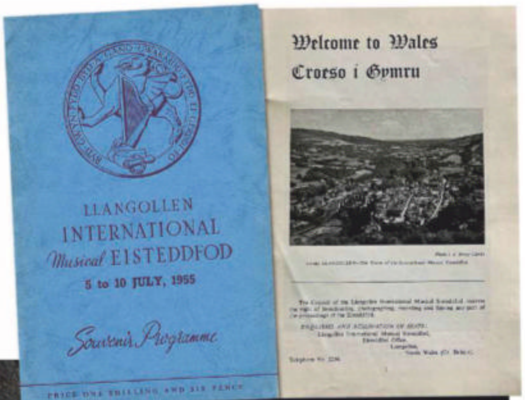
Most people would want a break after such tiring or traumatic stage experiences. However, most competitions ask participants to stay for the duration of the event to play in community and celebratory concerts – this became too much for one finalist, who refused to play in the recent Hamamatsu closing gala, leaving his colleagues to plug the gap. The psychology of competitions has plenty in common with sports events – the quadrennial Cliburn is dubbed the 'Piano Olympics' – but despite the parallels, musicians are not athletes, and music is not sport. Bartók's famous observation that competitions are 'for horses, not artists' remains potent.

However, as the race for resources continues apace, competitions offer a useful format to share developmental means while simultaneously garnering public interest. Yehudi Menuhin set up his eponymous competition for young violinists in 1983, funded by his foundation, while the Cliburn was established in 1962, hot on the heels of its namesake's win at the Tchaikovsky Competition in Moscow. The Kathleen Ferrier Awards, the prestigious UK competition for opera singers, began after a memorial fund was set up in the singer's name.

In a similar spirit, former pupils have recently launched a new competition to honour pianist Bruno Mezzena (1927-2017), a student of Arturo Benedetti Michelangeli. The biennial Premio Bruno Mezzena International Piano Competition is based at Odradek Records' studio in Montesilvano, Italy, with the first instalment set for this November. One

admires their endeavours, but does the world need another piano competition? 'We asked ourselves the same thing,' says John Anderson, who co-founded the event with pianist Pina Napolitano and violinist Franco Mezzena, Bruno's son. 'We agreed that our competition should be different, in a way that honours our teacher's meritocracy and musicianship. The cash prizes are not huge; we are offering career support, including a digital album release.'

There are different types of judging methodology, spanning long panel discussions to anonymous tick charts. Noriko Ogawa, who chaired the jury at Hamamatsu in 2024, was meticulous about maintaining neutrality for that competition. 'The pre-selection process was done blind, and we were given very limited information about each candidate,' she says. 'We never gossiped or discussed performances and

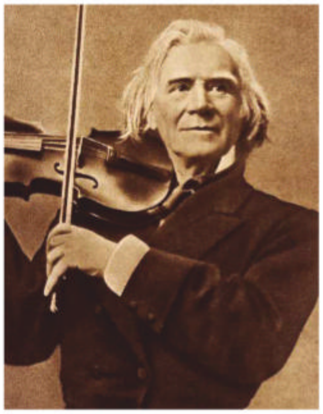


LLANGOLLEN
INTERNATIONAL
Musical EISTEDDFOD
5 to 10 JULY, 1955
Souvenir Programme
PRICE ONE SHILLING AND SIX PENCE

Welcome to Wales
Croeso i Gymru

Playing politics: 2024 Queen Elisabeth winner Dmytro Udovychenko snubbed the Russian jury member; (below) Ole Bull was celebrated at the 2010 Menuhin Competition

Nightmare moment: Tianxu An prepared a different work



> At the Menuhin Competition 2010, Ole Bull's music was part of the set repertoire, helping to extend the violinist's legacy beyond Europe

just got on with scoring.' Anderson is as keen to ensure fairness, 'We considered putting up a screen, so we didn't see the musicians, but it just doesn't work,' he says. It's a cold reality that spectacle is an important aspect of competitions.

So too is politics. At the 2024 Queen Elisabeth Competition in Belgium, Ukrainian first-prize winner, violinist Dmytro Udovychenko, shook the hands of each panel member, with the exception of Vadim Repin, a Russian-born Belgian violinist with rumoured Putin affinities. This followed the World Federation of International Music Competitions' (WFIMC) exclusion of Moscow's Tchaikovsky Competition from membership in 2022. 'In times of war especially,' wrote the Geneva-based WFIMC, 'we believe it to be essential to maintain a dialogue with those who trust us and who share our values, the same way as we trust them.'

A strong participant can be as useful for a competition as much as the musician. Earlier this year, a 60m chalk drawing of Luciano Pavarotti was installed on a hillside in North Wales to celebrate what would have been the tenor's 90th birthday. The Dee Valley has long shared a close connection with the famous singer, since his choir won the Llangollen International Musical Eisteddfod back in 1955. Pavarotti was singing alongside his father, competing in what was the eighth instalment of the competition. He returned to Llangollen in 1995, telling the audience: 'When journalists ask me what was the most memorable day in my life, I always say it is when I won this competition.' Among the upcoming commemorative recordings is a remastered version of Pavarotti's Llangollen performance with the Corale Rossini, believed to be the earliest surviving audio featuring Pavarotti's voice (*The Lost Concert: Live At Llangollen*; out this Autumn on Decca).

But the winner doesn't necessarily take all. Artur Pizarro, president of the jury at the inaugural Premio Bruno Mezzena, won first prize at the Leeds in 1990. But a few years earlier, in 1975, Mitsuko Uchida came second, having also been the runner-up at the Chopin in 1970 – it did her career no harm at all. Ditto Gidon Kremer, who came third at the Queen Elisabeth Competition in 1967 and András Schiff, who did not receive a prize from several events. Plenty of household names, such as Yo-Yo Ma and Lang Lang, have never taken part in a competition.

When done properly, a competition can do music a great service. In 2010, the Menuhin Competition was held in Oslo with a focus on Ole Bull, the Norwegian violinist said to be on a par with Paganini. Bull's music was part of the set repertoire, helping to extend his legacy beyond Northern Europe. Other events commission bespoke pieces, supporting composers alongside performers (at the Cliburn, juror Gabriela Montero's *Rachtime* was played by all 29 pianists) and having the added benefit of seeing how candidates interpret a piece from scratch. Some are even more repertoire-focused: there's the Khachaturian International Competition in Yerevan, the International Franz Liszt Piano Competition in Utrecht and, ironically, the Bartók World Competition in Budapest – all requiring performances of the composer in whose honour they are held.

'When it came to competitions, Bruno Mezzena agreed with Bartók,' says Anderson, 'but he also said they are necessary.' It's this pragmatism that means competitions are unlikely to suffer elimination.

QUEEN ELISABETH COMPETITION/THOMAS LÉONARD, YOU TUBE/ TCHIKOVSKY COMPETITION, GETTY, DECCA CLASSICS

Ludlow United Kingdom

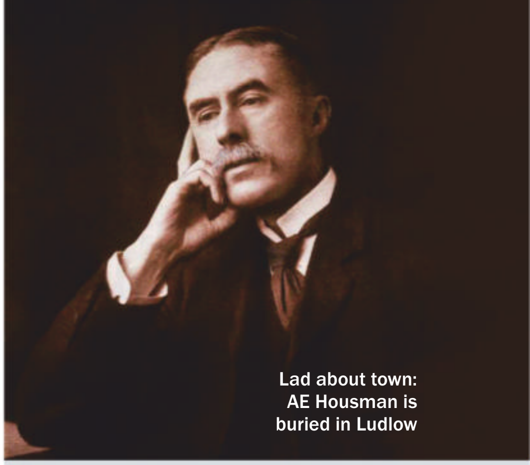
Each April, the English Song Weekend fills this Shropshire town with music by composers from both near and far, writes *Rebecca Franks*

Shropshire sounds: flautist Adam Walker performs in St Laurence's Church; (opposite) Ludlow town centre; Mhairi Lawson and Paula Chateauneuf; Ann Murray's masterclass; Janet Baker and John Bridcut in conversation

If you love the music of Benjamin Britten, chances are you might pay Aldeburgh a visit. But where do you go if you want to savour the tradition of Vaughan Williams and Finzi? Cue the Ludlow English Song Weekend, which takes place every April in Shropshire, the county of AE Housman's evocative 'blue remembered hills'. Spring feels like an apt season for song, and so I happily pack my bags for a long weekend in Ludlow, which as the festival's artistic director Iain Burnside tells me, is 'such a bonnie place'.

He is spot on. Ludlow is a beautiful market town, surrounded by lush green countryside in the Welsh Marches. It boasts layers of historical architecture, with winding medieval streets, timbered Tudor and elegant Georgian buildings all jostling for attention. Much of the Song Weekend takes place right at the town's heart – in the Assembly Rooms, now home to a cinema and café, on the market square. The nearby St Laurence's Church is the other venue. You can easily pop over to Ludlow Castle between concerts or, as I do, have lunch in the square's charming deli and browse the independent bookshop. I later learn from Burnside that I've missed a wonderful pottery down a side road. 'Oh, take your credit card!' he enthuses.

Setting shopping distractions aside, there's plenty of time to enjoy the real reason for my visit: the music. The 2025 programme is packed, taking the audience right through from Friday night's Venice-inspired opening recital (with baritone Andrew Hamilton and Burnside at the piano) to Sunday afternoon's affectionate



Lad about town: AE Housman is buried in Ludlow

Local hero

AE Housman

AE Housman (1859-1936) is best remembered for *A Shropshire Lad*, a collection of 63 poems that has inspired hundreds of composers, perhaps most memorably Vaughan Williams with his *On Wenlock Edge*. The poet and classicist was living in London at the time he wrote them and hadn't even visited Shropshire (although he had grown up in neighbouring Worcestershire), yet his melancholic evocation of a 'land of lost content' struck a chord with the public. He died in Cambridge, but his ashes were buried in Ludlow, outside St Laurence's Church.

portrait of Housman, painted through songs and letters (actor Alex Jennings and a trio of singers). In between, I am transported to the courts of King James VI and I in an atmospheric late-night concert by soprano Mhairi Lawson and theorbo player Paula Chateauneuf, while on Saturday morning I enjoy mezzo Bethany Horak-Hallett and baritone Dan D'Souza charting love's complicated course. 'A couple in real life, they are expressly forbidden from breaking up before Saturday lunchtime,' Burnside notes wryly in his programme book welcome.

The repertoire is far more wide-ranging than 'English Song Weekend' might suggest, and the festival is open-minded and outward-looking. 'Initially, people said there wasn't enough repertoire and that it would get very boring,' says Burnside, noting that the festival grew out of the desire of a group of the Finzi Friends to celebrate their namesake's music. 'But that's the interesting challenge. Not to be stuck in one particular mould.' Yes, there's Vaughan Williams, Finzi and even Britten. But I also encounter lesser-known names like Madeleine Dring and Nicholas Lanier. There's music from Australia and the US; I hear William Bolcom, Amy Beach and Brett Dean. Sung in translation by Jeremy Sams, Mendelssohn and Hahn (to give two examples) sit alongside Michael Head.

Young composers are given airtime too, thanks to a bespoke programme. 'We didn't want to become too comfortable and too pipe and slippers,' says Burnside. 'The young composers bring a different energy to the weekend. They support each other, and it's lovely to see some younger faces out there in the audience too.' Each year, five composers are selected from a national open call. Their songs are workshopped at the Royal Birmingham Conservatoire, and then performed across the festival. And young singers have their turn in 2025 in a masterclass with Dame Ann Murray.

'Expect a weekend filled with laughter, concentration and a sense of community'

While it's perfectly possible to dip in and out of what's on offer, many audience members make a whole weekend of the festival. If you can find time between a coffee and Cole Porter, there are also talks and interviews, and on Saturday afternoon, after a screening of John Bridcut's documentary about Dame Janet Baker, the singer herself joins the director on stage for an interview, full of surprises.

For 2026, the festival pays homage to its roots with a feast of Finzi to mark 70 years since his death – including his settings of Thomas Hardy poetry. That's another joy of a song festival: it's as much a celebration of poetry as song. Once again, there will be a blend of established and up-and-coming singers and pianists, while actor Alex Jennings returns for his portrait of a poet, and actor Joanna Scanlan joins for a programme juxtaposing contemporary female poets with Hardy.

It's all wrapped up in the festival ethos, summed up by Burnside: 'People can expect a friendly welcome and a wonderful weekend in a beautiful place filled with laughter, some concentration and a sense of community.' I can vouch for that.

Further info: the Ludlow English Song Weekend takes place 10-12 April 2026; **ludlowenglishsongweekend.com**

SAM B. CORNISH, GETTY

Composer of the Week is broadcast on Radio 3 at 4pm, Monday to Friday. Programmes in Dec 2025 are:

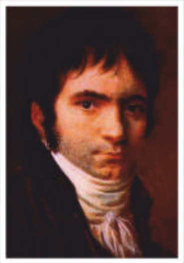
1-5 December John Rutter
8-12 December A Medieval Christmas
15-19 December Prokofiev
22-26 December A Georgian Christmas
29 Dec – 2 Jan British Light Music

Franz Schubert

From angst to acceptance, Schubert's ability to switch seamlessly between states of mind was a unique part of his genius, says ***Stephen Johnson***

ILLUSTRATION: MATT HERRING

Schubert's style



Lyrical impulse Schubert can do taut germinal motifs, like Beethoven (left), but he lives for the moment when singing melody takes over and carries the music to new heights. Song is always at the heart of his music, sometimes implying words, sometimes going way beyond verbal expression.

Clues and signposts In some of his large-scale works, Schubert plants clues to deeper meanings by evoking his songs. The use of the song 'Death and the Maiden' in the D minor Quartet, D 810, is clear enough, but what about the grim echo of 'Doppelgänger' in the Agnus Dei from the Mass in E flat? And are these really explanations, or could Schubert be teasing us?

Dislocation Sometimes, when it seems that the spirit of song reigns supreme, something jarring will happen. The gorgeous hymn-like meditation of the C major Quintet's *Adagio* is disrupted by stormy, jagged, anguished music that seems to contradict everything we've just heard. But then the song resumes, as though nothing had happened... almost.

Hypnosis Beethoven loves setting up patterns in order to disrupt them. Schubert will often let a simple repeated rhythm carry the music over long spans. It can be mesmerising, like a hypnotically regular walking pace or dance step, giving the melody a kind of benign current of air on which to float.

GETTY

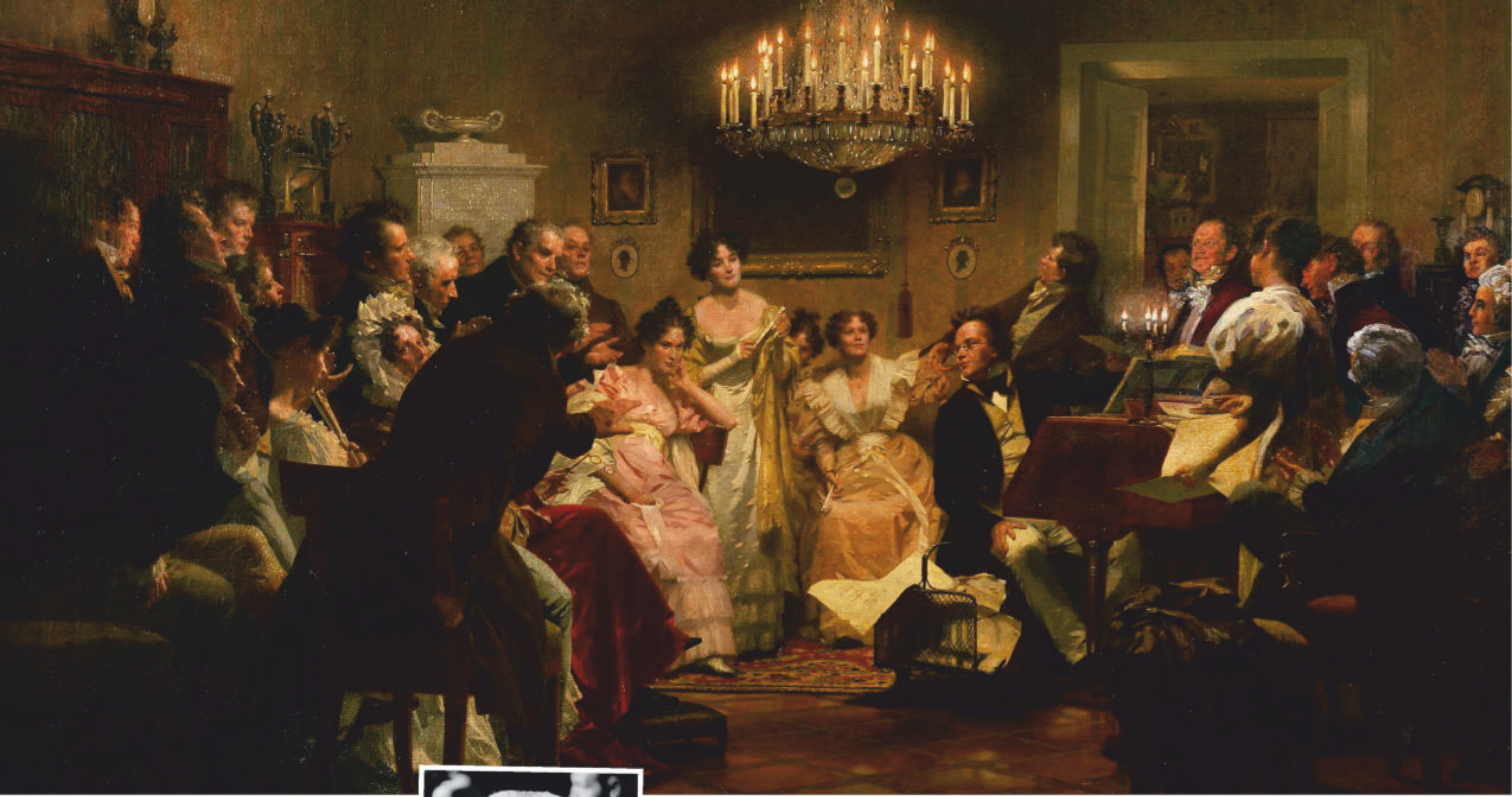
On one level he seems so direct, so simple, so uncomplicatedly appealing. Schubert could turn on heart-lifting melody with the same ease that most of us would turn on a tap. Often he seems happy just to bask in his own lyrical ferility, rather than go in for the kind of ingenious, viscerally compelling development taken to such heights by Beethoven. And that's the idea of Schubert that prevailed until well into the 20th century. He was an innocent, an exquisite charmer who composed in a kind of ecstatic trance – a sleepwalker, but not one of music's challenging thinkers. George Bernard Shaw even called him 'brainless'.

In some of Schubert's greatest works, seeming antitheses are starkly, unsettlingly juxtaposed

It was Schubert himself who undid all this in the end, simply because more and more of his vast and hugely varied output came to light. His first surviving effort at composition dates from his eleventh year; 20 years later he was dead. Over this period he finished or partly completed over 20 piano sonatas, 13 symphonies, 20 stage works, 15 string quartets and over 630 songs, not to mention numerous sacred and secular choral pieces, and a staggering amount of this is of outstanding quality. But at his death, only a minute fraction of this had been heard, still less published. His poignant original epitaph, 'Music has buried here a treasure, but even fairer hope', turned out to be badly mistaken. But you can't blame its author, Franz Grillparzer. Like most of Schubert's friends, he'd seen only the tip of an enormous iceberg.

Even when you've taken care, as I have, to get to know as much as possible of Schubert's output, arriving at a clear, overarching viewpoint is hard, perhaps impossible. And yet that's one of the things that makes him so fascinating. There are so many facets to his musical personality. Just take his two fully grown-up symphonies: the 'Unfinished' B minor and the 'Great' C major. The C major Symphony is unmistakably a work of the great outdoors, composed during a restorative walking holiday. It's always on the move: a steady tread – strolling, striding, dancing, galloping – is always present. The mood of the *Finale* may seem poised on a knife-edge, but the evocation of Beethoven's 'Ode to Joy' is unmistakable, and the race to the finish is thrilling, ultimately uplifting. The 'Unfinished' on the other hand – or at least its two surviving movements – is darkly meditative, poised between despair and sweet resignation. It's no surprise to discover that Schubert was seriously ill around the time he wrote it. And it feels chillingly apt that the first theme should echo so strongly a contemporary song, 'Der Zwerg' ('The Dwarf'), charged with eerily perverse sexuality.

But these are two separate works, written at different times. In some of Schubert's greatest chamber works, piano pieces and songs, these seeming antitheses are more starkly, unsettlingly juxtaposed. Schubert's thinking in these has been compared to the logic of dreams and, as in dreams, it can turn and twist suddenly.



GETTY

At first, the penultimate piano sonata (the A major, D 959) brims with warm confidence. It seems sure enough of where it is heading. But in the first movement's central 'development' section – the point where Beethoven would probably notch up the tension and start deconstructing for all he's worth – Schubert seems to lose himself in reverie. A delicious little tune drifts back and forth between two keys, adding embellishments but not essentially changing – any sense of goal-direction is lost. The second movement begins with an achingly sad melody, which eventually returns, but not before the movement has gone through a kind of written-out nervous breakdown. The abyss gapes – horror stares in through the window, but then Schubert draws the curtain and resumes his song. What just happened?

Even some of Schubert's best-loved works show a similar... no, 'volatility' isn't the word. It's more like an ability to side-step between different spiritual planes. The slow movement of the C major String Quartet is music that can seem to defy the passing of time. The novelist Thomas Mann called it 'the kind of music one would like to hear on one's deathbed'. At times like this, the music does seem more than 'half in love with easeful death', to borrow a phrase from Keats. But then what of the quintet's ending – half-defiant, half-delirious, finally flinging on the brake with a grinding emphatic semitone? We've entered the same territory as the finale of the D minor 'Death and the Maiden' String Quartet, only here Schubert seems to draw back from his final vision in alarm.

Schubert can help us from the frustration and disappointment of trying to find a 'way'

At times, Schubert does seem to point us towards the conclusion that one of the states he evokes so tellingly is delusional, the other starkly real. In that respect, the song 'Frühlingstraum' from the desolate *Winterreise* cycle is classic. It begins with a lilting, sunny little tune as the singer emerges from dreams of love and happiness, but as the reality of his freezing, love-exiled current existence sinks in, bright major turns increasingly to sombre minor. 'When will I hold my girl in my arms again?' A cold A minor chord from the piano provides the answer: 'Never!'

But in other places, Schubert seems to suggest that any of these states can be fully real if we inhabit it fully. For most of its length, the Octet for clarinet, bassoon, horn and string quintet seems to inhabit a world of pastoral pleasure less complicated than that of the 'Great' C major Symphony. But a ghostly presence twice chills the mood of the finale, in the form of a reference to a song, 'Die Götter Griechenlands' ('The Gods of Greece'), and particularly to its heartrending opening line, 'Beautiful world, where are you?' Is this the 'truth' – that the Octet's holiday mood is just doomed escapist distraction? You may conclude that, but it's hard to resist the feeling that the fun and friendliness are real too. Or take the conclusion of the astonishing G major Quartet, its tiny coda dispelling trauma, mania and upheaval with light Mozartean laughter. Contradictions or not, these states can even coexist. The pioneering Schubert pianist Artur Schnabel used to sing words to the theme of the finale of the last piano sonata: 'I don't know if I'm happy; I don't know if I'm sad'. Well, how often is life uncomplicatedly 'happy' or 'sad'?

An ability to dance between emotional planes, a way of proceeding in music which isn't really progress at all but more like a kind of inspired daydreaming – one can see why things like this might have displeased those who like their musical

A devoted audience: (left) Julius Schmid's 1896 *Schubertiade*, depicting the composer at the piano; (below left) pianist Artur Schnabel used to sing words to the music of Schubert's final sonata

thought systematic, clearly purposeful and preferably optimistic – the George Bernard Shaws of this world. (Shaw took even his hero Wagner to task for what he considered his grand operatic frippery in *Götterdämmerung*.) When it comes to the broad formal outlines of his music, then Schubert looks like a 'classical' composer along the lines of Haydn, Mozart or Beethoven – if an unusually expansive one. Schubert even modelled some of his structures on specific movements from Beethoven, though in the process he transformed them so much that 'derivative' or 'imitative' are the last words one would apply to them. As Stravinsky said, 'A good composer doesn't imitate – he steals.'

But when we get to the heart of how Schubert's music thinks/feels, it can seem very close to what Keats famously called 'Negative Capability' – the ability to be 'in uncertainties, mysteries, doubts, without any irritable reaching after fact and reason'. Beethoven can take us through dark, haunted territory, he can open up the possibility that – in his own wonderful phrase – 'sometimes the opposite is also true'. (The tiny but infinitely suggestive oboe cadenza in the first movement of the Fifth Symphony is a prime example.) But we know that he will lead us out the other side of the forest, that we'll be able to stand with him and look back over where we've come, and finally make sense of it.

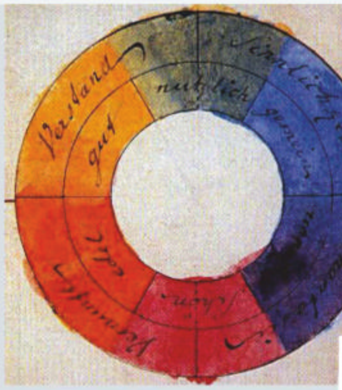
Schubert doesn't do that. He's more like Kafka – the Kafka of the fascinating quasi-religious parables and fragments, aware that life doesn't make sense but capable of being, if not at peace with the absurdity of life, then able to bear with it without reaching desperately for solutions or explanations. There are times when we may need Beethoven to help us find our way through, and out of, something dark and painful. But there are also times when Schubert can help save us from the frustration and disappointment of trying to find a 'way' at all. When friends grumbled that *Winterreise*'s songs were just too gloomy, he replied, 'I like them more than any of [my] other songs, and the day will come when you will like them too.' Just be with him, wherever he takes you, and you may well be the better for it. Almost certainly he'll leave you singing – and isn't that more or less the same thing?

SCHUBERT Life & Times

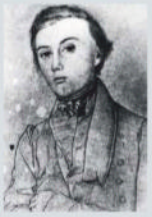
1797

LIFE: Franz Schubert is born on 31 January in the ***Himmelpfortgrund*** district of Vienna. He is the 12th child of Franz Theodor, a well-regarded local schoolteacher, and Elizabeth.

TIMES: Zwiazek Wojskowy, a group of Polish officers led by Joachim Denisko, sparks an uprising against Austrian and Russian occupation, but is soon defeated.



1810



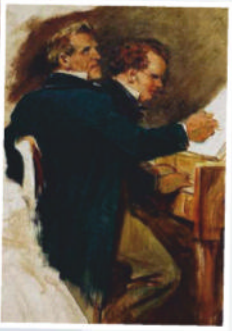
LIFE: As a member of the Hofkapelle court choir, he is educated at the Imperial College where, ***in his early teens***, he composes works such as his Fantasie in G for piano duet.

TIMES: The German writer and philosopher Johann Wolfgang von Goethe publishes his ***Theory of Colours***, in which he focuses specifically on how various shades are perceived by humans.

1814

LIFE: While he reluctantly embarks on a career as a schoolteacher, works such as his *Gretchen am Spinnrade* for voice and piano confirm his exceptional development as a composer.

TIMES: Led by Britain, Russia, Austria and Prussia, representatives from across Europe meet at the Congress of Vienna to draw up a new political framework following the defeat of Napoleon.



1819

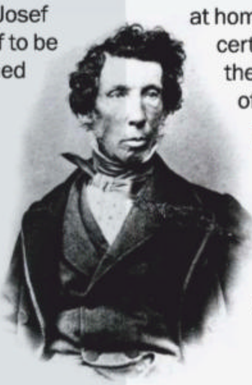
LIFE: During a summer spent at the home of baritone ***Michael Vogl***, a close friend, he begins work on his 'Trout' Quintet, whose fourth movement is based on his own song 'Die Forelle'.

TIMES: Depicting the wreck of a naval frigate off the coast of Africa, Théodore Géricault's highly political *The Raft of the Medusa* causes controversy when displayed at the Paris Salon.

1824

LIFE: Aware that his health is declining badly, he writes to playwright Josef Kupelweiser that 'I find myself to be the most unhappy and wretched creature in the world'.

TIMES: After conducting the premiere of his 'Choral' Ninth Symphony at Vienna's Theater am Kärntnertor, the nearly deaf Beethoven has to be turned round to see the audience's applause.



1828

LIFE: He dies, aged 31, on 19 November at home in Vienna. Though his death certificate gives 'nervous fever' as the cause, his symptoms are those of tertiary syphilis.

TIMES: For the first time ever, an organic compound is created artificially when German chemist ***Friedrich Wöhler*** synthesises urea by treating silver cyanate with ammonium chloride.

Building a library

Sergei Rachmaninov

Piano Concerto No. 2

Jessica Duchen enjoys more than a brief encounter with the Russian's much-loved work as she gets on track with the best recordings available

The composer

Born into an aristocratic family in 1873, Rachmaninov hit the ground running as a musician. By his late teens, he had already left the Moscow Conservatory with the Great Gold Medal and with praise ringing in his ears for his abilities both as a pianist and as the composer of works such as his opera *Aleko*. A financial boost then followed with the publication of his Prelude in C sharp minor, but life would take a turn for the worse when Tchaikovsky, a staunch supporter, died in 1893. The subsequent slump in Rachmaninov's spirits deepened further with the calamitous premiere of his First Symphony four years later.

Building a Library is broadcast on Radio 3 at 3.30pm each Saturday as part of *Record Review*. A highlights podcast is available on BBC Sounds.

The work

Let's get the inevitable out of the way: Rachmaninov's Piano Concerto No. 2 is one of the most popular pieces in history, and it also made David Lean's 1945 *Brief Encounter* into the movie we know and still (sometimes) love eight decades later, an anniversary that provides an ideal excuse to delve into the music's recorded legacy.

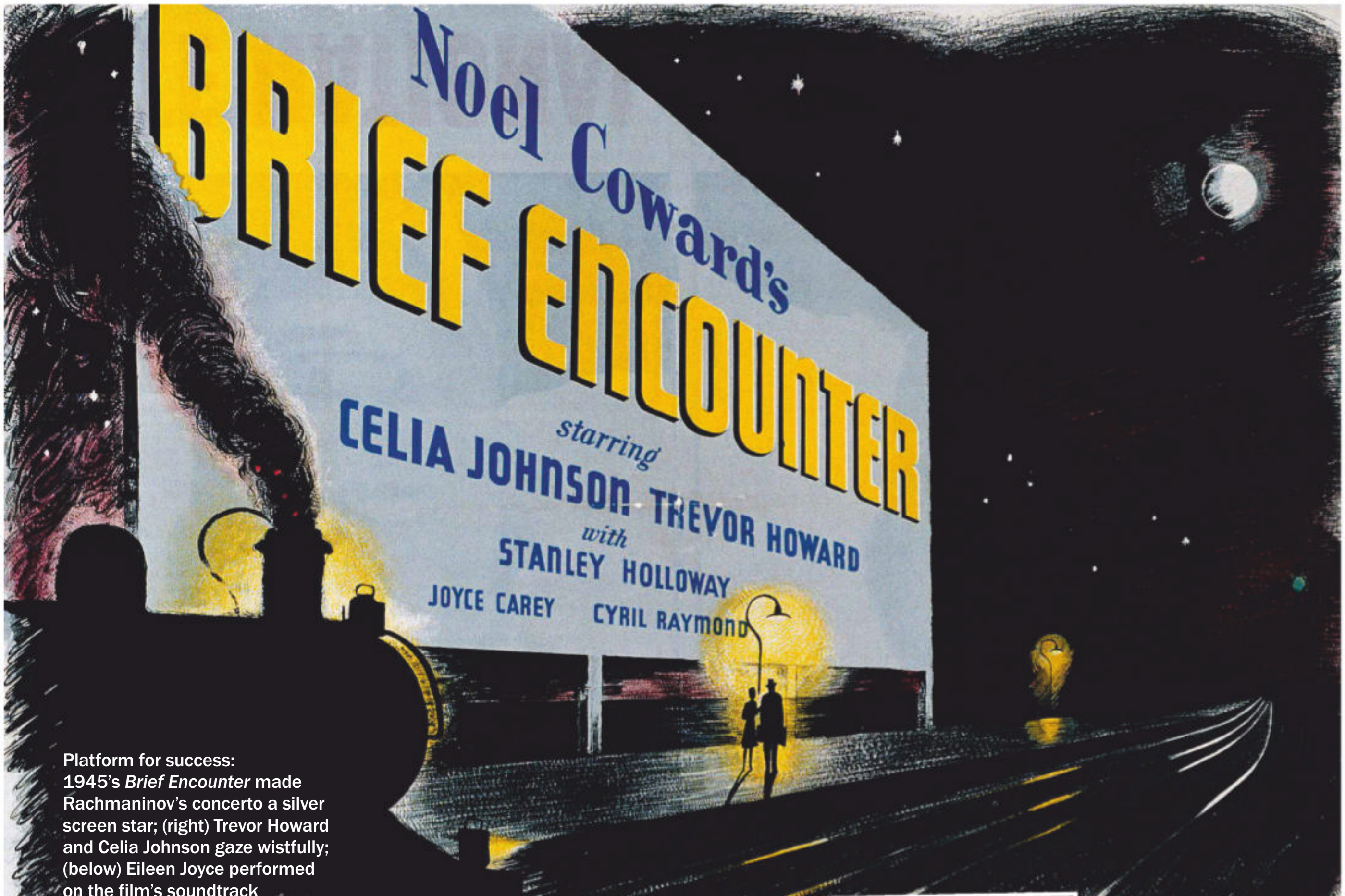
Based on Noël Coward's play, *Brief Encounter* stars Celia Johnson and Trevor Howard as two ordinary, married, middle-class people who meet at a railway station in a prim English town and fall in love. Their passion and their consciences tussle behind the unassailable façade of propriety and convention. Lean uses Rachmaninov's music to say more about their true feelings than they do themselves. As the opening chords – played on the soundtrack by the Australian pianist Eileen Joyce – emerge through the steam of a passing train, it is often the music, more than the images, that captures our hearts.

As the chords emerge through the steam of a passing train, the music captures our hearts

The concerto did much for David Lean's film, but the same cannot be said in reverse. That association has done untold damage to this already popular musical masterpiece. Don't get me started on the psychological association that runs something like: 'Cinema means cheap, mawkish sentimentality, so let's make it sound like that.' Cinema is, of course, an artform that can match any other in profundity, insights and emotional nuance – but widespread prejudice against it appears to have had a heinous effect on how this concerto is sometimes regarded and, indeed, interpreted.

The truth is that there is nothing in Rachmaninov's concerto that need be remotely sentimental, while Olympic-racing, crash-bang-wallop performances are equally the last thing it needs. Interestingly, early biographies sometimes comment that unlike Tchaikovsky – whose successor Rachmaninov was touted to be in pre-Revolution Russia – he was viewed as a composer whose emotions remained relatively remote. As for his pianism, his contemporaries often remarked on the beauty of his sound, its singing nature, its variety of colour. 'That is the most important thing for me in my interpretations, *colour*,' Rachmaninov once explained. 'So you make music live. Without colour, it is dead.'

Few concertos need less introduction than this one. Its history is part of its success story. Briefly: after Rachmaninov's Symphony No. 1 had a disastrous premiere in 1897 in St Petersburg under the baton of a possibly inebriated Alexander Glazunov, the unfortunate young composer experienced a creative block that lasted several years. 'My dreams of a brilliant career lay shattered,' he wrote. 'My hopes and confidence were destroyed.' In 1898, his cousin, the pianist and composer Alexander Siloti, scored a smash hit for him by introducing the Prelude in C sharp



Platform for success: 1945's *Brief Encounter* made Rachmaninov's concerto a silver screen star; (right) Trevor Howard and Celia Johnson gaze wistfully; (below) Eileen Joyce performed on the film's soundtrack

minor to American audiences; yet still the music within him seemed dammed up.

Finally, Rachmaninov, then in his mid-twenties, consulted Dr Nikolai Dahl, a physician who was exploring the use of hypnosis, or 'autosuggestion' as it was termed. Rachmaninov later recalled: 'I heard the same hypnotic formula repeated day after day while I lay half asleep in the armchair in Dahl's study. "You will write a Concerto. ... You will work with great facility. ... It will be excellent." ... Although it may sound incredible, this cure really helped me. By the autumn I had finished two movements of the Concerto...'

The second and third movements were premiered in 1900; the whole piece was finished a few months later. Concertos, historically, have often been dedicated to commissioners, patrons or performers. This one is dedicated to Dr Dahl. It cleared the way for Rachmaninov to become the first musical superstar of the new century. Movie or no movie, it has rarely been out of earshot or out of mind since.

The quantity of recordings is staggering, as is the range of interpretations. You might fondly imagine that nobody would dare perform such a piece without taking full account of what is actually in the score, or without deep consideration of the composer's intentions beyond the notation, or without the basic musical sense to pull off the work's challenges – not just in terms of fast fingers, but in pacing, voicing, quality of sound and creation of atmosphere. You might also assume that nobody would record it without paying close attention to the balance of piano and orchestra and the partnership between the soloist and the conductor.

Dear reader, let's get the disillusionment over and done with too. There are many, many wonderful recordings of the concerto. There are also some horrors. What follows is a very personal selection; inevitably some superb performances are missing from it, so please don't assume that anything not appearing on the next page is among the horrors.

Turn the page to discover our recommended recordings of Rachmaninov's Piano Concerto No. 2

GETTY

Leading the way: Sergei Rachmaninov's own recording as soloist is essential listening

Pure poetry with an authentic touch

The best recording

Rachmaninoff
Piano Concerto No.2
Piano Concerto No.3

Sergei Rachmaninov *(piano)*

Philadelphia Orchestra/Leopold Stokowski
Biddulph BDF-ED-LHW036

Rachmaninov himself at the piano, recorded in 1929, is bound to remain a benchmark, even after nearly a century. Like many performers at the start of the recording era, Rachmaninov was microphone-shy and some say that he played much more freely and expressively when the red light was off. Also, the story goes that he and Leopold Stokowski started off at loggerheads about this interpretation, with the final compromise that Stokowski called the shots in the second movement and the composer in the finale. Yet there is nothing in the recording that audibly suggests either that Rachmaninov is freezing up or that he and his conductor were not in accord.

The performance lays down some basics and also creates a character that is all too rare. First, if you take a look at the score, that famous introduction is not quite an introduction; it is basically in tempo with the first subject, but for a brief *ritardando* in the octaves before the main theme begins in earnest. Many players ignore this, do not pace the *crescendo*, then forget that when the melody comes in, they are accompanying it, not vice versa. Rachmaninov, in contrast, shows us how to do the pacing properly – flexible, but not jarring – and then in the second subject, his playing is pure poetry, weaving together several voices, each singing fit for a lieder recital.

The filigree central section resembles the dizzying whirl of untrappable dreams

The Philadelphia Orchestra match him with a purposeful sense of direction, plus the celebrated string tone that suggests every player either is, or has studied with, a Russian-School Golden Age virtuoso. Soloist and conductor, despite everything, build a real partnership, without drowning or deference.

The second movement is not too slow, which helps to sustain the melody as a singer might – perhaps Rachmaninov's friend, the bass Feodor Chaliapin –

Three other great recordings

Legends
Rachmaninov
Piano Concertos 2 & 3
ASHKENAZY

Vladimir Ashkenazy *(piano)*
Ashkenazy recorded the concerto several times, with conductors including André Previn and Bernard Haitink, but it is the 1963 one with Kirill Kondrashin and the Moscow Philharmonic Orchestra that got under my skin. Ashkenazy, aged about 26 here, has a freshness, sincerity and intimacy to his playing that is deeply touching. The mercurial fingerwork, gentle pointing up of inner voices and exquisite singing tone – you can take these for granted from him. With the orchestra pliable and sensual under Kondrashin, it's a formidably lovable performance. *(Decca 466 3752)*

RACHMANINOV
PIANO CONCERTOS 2 & 3

Simon Trpčeski *(piano)*
This 2010 recording can enrapture us with its ideal mix of sensitivity, warmth, balance and generosity, and its sense of give and take. Trpčeski, conductor Vasily Petrenko and the Royal Liverpool Philharmonic create rapt atmospheres, with a freshness of response that seems to spruce up the concerto as if new-minted. There's exemplary attention to detail, but also a gorgeous spontaneity; you feel that the performers are having the time of their lives. The RLPO plays with luxuriant richness of tone that manages

also to keep its transparency, aided by fine recorded sound. *(Avie AV2192)*

Great Performances
RACHMANINOFF
PIANO CONCERTO NO. 2
RHAPSODY ON A THEME OF PAGANINI
GRAFFMAN
BERNSTEIN
NEW YORK
PHILHARMONIC

Gary Graffman (piano)
This 1964 recording has the Romanticism you would expect from Leonard Bernstein as conductor – but luckily, great feeling does not mean gloop. Graffman, shortly before he lost the use of his right hand at the piano, is a wonderful soloist, navigating the work's musical traps with flair and good sense. In the company of the New York Phil, he matches his conductor for grand vision, while drawing out a plethora of varied colour – that crucial quality – in the piano writing. The *Adagio* is rather slow, but the finale really is *scherzando* and the vividness and immediacy make it quite special. *(Sony G0100010754906)*

And one to avoid...

Made in 1959, this was my favourite recording growing up – and it remains many people's favourite now. But, revisiting it, soloist Sviatoslav Richter and conductor Stanislaw Wislocki pull the music around so much, and are so heavy-footed, I find it simply depressing. Many others could take the avoidance slot: one famous soloist with an elephantine touch, another who is clueless about pacing, a third prosaic *à la* estate agent brochure. To press factory reset, go back to the composer himself.

spinning gorgeous legatos and articulated, speaking phrase endings. The filigree central section resembles the dizzying whirl of untrappable dreams. As for the finale, its direction is *Allegro scherzando* (you'd never believe it from certain other recordings) and the composer plays it that way: light, quicksilver, glistening. There is no sentimentality in the big tune, but its final climactic return is truly exhilarating.

Sound quality has been remastered to fine effect too. Naturally, we must make allowances for such an historic document, but if you are looking for a touchstone 'Rach 2', this is definitely it.

GETTY, NIKOLAJ LUND

Russian flair: Yevgeny Sudbin is at home in the thrilling First Piano Concerto by Nikolai Medtner (below)

Continue the journey...

Five works to explore after Rachmaninov's Piano Concerto No. 2

By 1926, when he wrote his Piano Concerto No. 4, **Rachmaninov** was in a very different place, uprooted from Russia by the Revolution in 1917 and now living in the US. And while his Third Concerto had trod similar, lushly Romantic ground to the Second, we're taken into new, often chromatic territory in the Fourth – particularly in the mysterious, brooding central *Largo*, with its 'Two lovely black eyes' main tune. (**Earl Wild (piano); RPO/Jascha Horenstein** *Chandos CHAN10078(2)X)*

> The finale ebbs and flows from darkly disturbing to intensely thrilling

Rachmaninov himself described his younger compatriot **Nikolai Medtner** as 'the greatest composer of our time'. Medtner may not have enjoyed the fame and fortune of his great friend and supporter, but his lavish talents can be amply heard in works such as his Piano Concerto No. 1 (1918), launched by furious torrents of notes from the soloist. The *Allegro molto* finale, meanwhile, ebbs and flows from darkly disturbing to intensely thrilling. *(***Yevgeny Sudbin (piano); São Paulo SO/John Neschling** *BIS BISSACD1588)*

Glazunov may have marmalised Rachmaninov's First Symphony as a conductor, but works such as his own Piano Concerto No. 1 of 1911 leave us in no doubt about his skills as a composer. There are just two movements here: a sumptuously orchestrated *Allegro moderato* based on a downwardly chromatic opening motif; then a theme and set of nine variations, ending with a triumphant flourish. *(***Severin von Eckardstein (pf); National of Orchestra of Belgium/Walter Weller** *Fuga Libera FUG521)*

Brief Encounter isn't all about moping to Rachmaninov – at one point, the two lovebirds also enjoy poking fun at a café cellist in **Moritz Moszkowski**'s Spanish Dance No. 5. For more Moszkowski, try his 1898 Piano Concerto in E Major, whose four movements are packed with sprightly charm. *(***Piers Lane (piano); BBC SSO/Jerzy Maksymiuk** *Hyperion CDA66452)*

Finally, a bit of Carmen. **Eric Carmen**, that is, whose single 'All By Myself', based on the second movement of Rachmaninov's Second Piano Concerto, was released 50 years ago this month. In 1996, Celine Dion took the song into power ballad territory and back into the charts with her massively popular cover version, but Carmen's original remains the classic weepie. *(YouTube)*

Reviews

Recordings and books rated by expert critics

Welcome

The idea of reimagining Beethoven's grand symphonies for three instruments might sound challenging. But listen to our Recording of the Month and you'll hear something extraordinary – Emanuel Ax, Leonidas Kavakos and Yo-Yo Ma (each masters of their art) bring fresh brilliance to the composer's work. The Chamber section is full of other gems, too: the Partch Ensemble's premiere recording of *The Wayward,* a funny and touching cycle of speech-songs from Harry Partch's wanderings across America stands out, as do Maya Magub and Matthew Schellhorn's waltz transcriptions for violin and piano. Elsewhere, look out for Tippett's powerful *A Child Of Our Time*, Kalevi Aho's 'Moonlight Concerto' and a definitive recording of Hasse's *Piramo e Tisbe*.
Miranda Bardsley *Reviews editor*

This month's critics

John Allison, Nicholas Anderson, Miranda Bardsley, Terry Blain, Kate Bolton-Porciatti, Geoff Brown, Michael Church, Christopher Cook, Martin Cotton, Christopher Dingle, Misha Donat, Jessica Duchen, Rebecca Franks, George Hall, Malcolm Hayes, Claire Jackson, Michael Jameson, Stephen Johnson, John-Pierre Joyce, Nicholas Kenyon, Ashutosh Khandekar, Erik Levi, Natasha Loges, Jon Lusk, Andrew McGregor, Freya Parr, Ingrid Pearson, Jeremy Pound, Anthony Pryer, Paul Riley, Jan Smaczny, Charlotte Smith, Jo Talbot, Anne Templer, Roger Thomas, Sarah Urwin Jones, Kate Wakeling, Alexandra Wilson

KEY TO STAR RATINGS

★★★★★	Outstanding
★★★★	Excellent
★★★	Good
★★	Disappointing
★	Poor

RECORDING OF THE MONTH

An inspired and artful ode to Beethoven

Joy and camaraderie are palpable in Yo-Yo Ma, Leonidas Kavakos and Emanuel Ax's latest release, notes ***Rebecca Franks***

Emanuel Ax
Leonidas Kavakos
Yo-Yo Ma
Beethoven for Three
Symphony No. 1
Op. 70 No. 1 "Ghost"
Op. 11 "Gassenhauer"
SONY

Beethoven for Three

Symphony No.1 (arr. Shai Wosner); Piano Trios, Op. 70, No. 1 'Ghost' & Op. 11 'Gassenhauer'
Yo-Yo Ma (cello), Leonidas Kavakos (violin), Emanuel Ax (piano)
Sony 19802908842 78:03 mins

Smiles are powerful. Radio presenters are often advised to smile, as listeners can hear it in their voices. (Wisdom that has since been underpinned by academic study.) So too are public speakers, as it helps create a connection with their audiences. And, after listening to Emanuel Ax, Leonidas Kavakos and Yo-Yo Ma's latest Beethoven album, I'm convinced that all three of them must be beaming, as their First Symphony in C major radiates infectious joy.

Perhaps they are simply delighting in the chance as star soloists to get stuck into one of Beethoven's symphonies, which has been brilliantly arranged by the pianist Shai Wosner for piano trio. It's clear that, even after more than a decade playing together as a trio (their partnership was forged at the Tanglewood Festival in 2014), they also still relish each other's playing. And unlike some 'superstar' ensembles which find personalities fighting for the spotlight, there's a unanimity of purpose here that always puts the music first.

That translates into real delight in Beethoven's continual invention. This might be his earliest symphony, completed in 1799 and first heard in Vienna the following year, but the trio accord it the same respect as they do his later symphonies in their previous volumes of 'Beethoven for Three'. The piano trio format works particularly well, too, for the scale of this symphony, which finds Beethoven the symphonist at his closest to

Three's a perfect score: (l-r) Leonidas Kavakos, Emanuel Ax and Yo-Yo Ma

LISA-MARIE MAZZUCCO

the Viennese Classicism of Haydn and Mozart. The group pull off the trick of making us forget about the orchestral instruments we're missing, and instead we can enjoy the depth of Ax's sound at the piano, and the agility and eloquence of Kavakos and Ma.

Their exuberant approach also lights up the *Allegro vivace e con brio* of the Piano Trio No. 5 in D major, 'Ghost', which is warmly recorded, as is the whole album. The only quibble is that this release deserves proper booklet notes beyond photos and credits.

After this first movement bristling with energy, the otherworldly *Largo assai ed espressivo* is beautifully handled, with the string players finding a haunting veiled tone, and towards the end building the tension with long-breathed phrases over Ax's mysterious piano tremolos. The *Presto* whisks us along to an exhilarating conclusion.

> It's clear that even after more than a decade, this trio still relish each other's playing

The Trio, Op. 11, published in 1798, is best known in its version for clarinet, cello and piano, but Beethoven decided a more orthodox trio line-up wouldn't hurt his sales and offered the violin as an alternative to the clarinet. Once again, this is an energised and energising performance, underpinned by particularly sparkling playing by Ax at the piano. All three adopt an appealing relaxed manner in the charming *Adagio*, with the two string players leaning into the expressive lyricism of their lines. Based on the popular melody 'Before I go to work' from Weigl's opera *L'amor marinaro ossia Il Corsaro*, the finale is a set of theme and variations. This chirpy street song, which gives the trio its 'Gassenhauer' nickname, is dispatched with great cheer – and that's also the mood in which both this trio and uplifting album end. Smiles all round. ★★★★★

Performer's notes
Emanuel Ax

This is the fourth instalment in your 'Beethoven for Three' series. What drew you to feature works that span over a decade of Beethoven's output?
The idea for the series came from my lifelong friend Yo-Yo Ma during the pandemic of 2020. He suggested trying this combination, since no orchestras were playing public concerts, and if we ever needed the solace and hope of Beethoven's music, this was the time. We learned the Second Symphony, because it was an arrangement supervised by Beethoven himself, and enjoyed it so much that continuing seemed very natural.

Can you tell us about the process behind reimagining such huge works like the First Symphony?
It has been incredibly rewarding. Most musicians have heard the Beethoven symphonies many times, but for non-musicians, it is a thrill to experience this music hands-on and to understand it better from the inside out. We also felt that this let us experience a bit of the way that these pieces would have lived in Beethoven's time – if one didn't own an orchestra or a palace. Thanks to the brilliance of our colleague Shai Wosner and his incredible musical intelligence and understanding, we gained a deeper connection to the world of Beethoven.

How has your musical relationship with Yo-Yo Ma and Leonidas Kavakos evolved since forming your trio in 2014?
Working with my dear friends Leonidas and Yo-Yo, and with Shai, has become a truly precious part of my life; I feel very lucky. As I am the oldest in the group, I only hope to stay compos mentis until we are able to finish the project.

Orchestral

ORCHESTRAL CHOICE

A performance of heroic proportions

Sarah Urwin Jones is captivated by Santtu-Matias Rouvali's take on Strauss

Philharmonia Records
Santtu conducts Strauss
Ein Heldenleben

R Strauss

Ein Heldenleben
Philharmonia Orchestra/
Santtu-Matias Rouvali
Signum Classics SIGCD922 50:12 mins

Santtu-Matias Rouvali's interpretation of Strauss' *Ein Heldenleben* (A Hero's Life) may be on the long side at 50 minutes, but it is rarely lagging. The extra time in the Philharmonic chief conductor's vision comes partly in the wildly cataclysmic battle scene between the 'hero' (assumed to be, at least in part, Strauss himself) and his 'adversaries' (oh those critics!) in 'Des Helden Walstatt'. That stretched tempo gives room for the thrilling high dramatics Rouvali encourages to depict this epic set-to.

The Philharmonia etch all the colours of Strauss's swirling and unashamedly heroic opening theme – in key as well as in thrust – with joyously defined energy. The 'adversaries', introduced in 'Des Helden Widersacher', and interrupting the flow throughout, are here comic grotesques, delineated with absolute ego-skewering precision by the Philharmonia instrumentalists (although whether the hero's or the critics' is moot). Leader Zsolt-Tihamér Visontay exploits every last ravishing phrase as the Hero's glorious 'companion' – 'Des Helden Gefährtin' – or Strauss's wife Pauline, anecdotally.

> The orchestral sound is superb and gloriously expansive

Throughout, the sound, both of the orchestra and the recording quality, is superb, the orchestra never fudged in the tapestry and gloriously expansive. As the returning echoes of the adversaries are finally laid to rest in the last moments, Visontay's violin rises ever higher as our Hero departs in what is one of the loveliest denouements in music. There is perhaps a slight breaking of flow here in the overtly-characterised violin phrasing and the doggedly insistent rumble in the bass, but it bears repeated listening. ★★★★★

High dramatics: Santtu-Matias Rouvali depicts an epic battle

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Beethoven

Symphonies Nos 5, 6 & 8
Orchestre Consuelo/Victor Julien-Laferrière
B Records LBM079 98 mins (2CD)

Halfway through a four-year project to perform (and record) a complete Beethoven symphony cycle curated by Festival de La Chaise-Dieu, Victor Julien-Laferrière's young orchestra squares up to two works (Symphonies 5 and 6) premiered at that epic Viennese Beethoven concert in 1808 that also featured the Piano Concerto No. 4, excerpts from the Mass in C, and the concert aria 'Ah! Perfido'.

In the generous (and therefore problematic) acoustic of the Abbatiale Saint-Robert, Julien-Laferrière also included the Eighth Symphony, and these discs are both a memento of the Festival's ongoing journey as well as a testament to the musicians' boundless vitality and sense of adventure.

Cellist-conductor Victor Julien-Laferrière is evidently well versed in historically informed performance practice when it comes to string vibrato; and one movement excepted, when it comes to tempi, his account of the Eighth Symphony even out-Norringtons Sir Roger Norrington's pioneering recording with his London Classical Players. Lively speeds and a reverberant acoustic don't make for ideal bedfellows, however. But listening through headphones sharpens the focus considerably.

That said, the Fifth Symphony's first movement tends towards the briskly workmanlike, and in the slow movement, when Beethoven allows the brow to unfurrow, the orchestra is less willing to follow his lead. The magical transition into the finale is also a touch prosaic, while the first movement of the Eighth doesn't have room to breathe, and the mechanical musings of the *Allegretto scherzando* are more *scherzando* than *allegretto*. Best are the merry peasants that throng the third movement of the 'Pastoral' – nifty on their feet and ready to party! A mixed achievement, perhaps, but not without some ear-opening textural insights. *Paul Riley* ★★★

Bliss

Miracle in the Gorbals; Metamorphic Variations
BBC Philharmonic/Michael Seal
Chandos CHSA5370 79:57 mins

BLISS
MIRACLE IN THE GORBALS
METAMORPHIC VARIATIONS
CHANDOS

Till now there has been just one complete recording of Bliss's 1944 ballet *Miracle in the Gorbals*, Christopher Lyndon-Gee's with the Queensland Symphony Orchestra (Naxos). This new one supplants it: the sound is significantly better, and the BBC

MARCO BORGGREVE, ERIC RICHMOND

Philharmonic's playing is both tidier and more sharply defined in terms of texture. Conductor Michael Seal is strong on atmosphere, distilling an unmistakable air of lurking menace in the shadowy Overture, where the dockside tenements of the Gorbals area in Glasgow are depicted. Murk also enshrouds the grim portrayal of 'The Girl Suicide', with appropriately louche woodwind inflections in 'The Prostitute and the Boy', and the scurrying sense of panic in 'Discovery of the Suicide's Body' is urgently projected. In movements such as 'The Street' and 'Dance of Deliverance' Seal's pointed articulation of the music's balletic rhythms is pleasingly evident. His fresh, observant interpretation makes the relative neglect of *Miracle in the Gorbals* seem less understandable than ever.

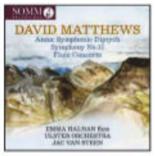
The coupling is Bliss's *Metamorphic Variations*, a late work from 1972. The three previous recordings of this piece omitted two movements excised by Bliss before the premiere. Seal reinstates them, pushing the playing time to 43 minutes. Both of the cut movements fully merit inclusion: hushed strings and vibraphone, with irruptions of xylophone, lend 'Contrasts' an enigmatic air, while 'Children's March' morphs from innocence to something palpably more unsettling. Seal again secures a confident, colourfully projected performance from the BBC Philharmonic, and the booklet notes (by Ben Earle and Andrew Burn) are excellent. *Terry Blain* ★★★★

David Matthews

Anna: Symphonique Diptych, Symphony No. 11, Flute Concerto

Emma Halnan (flute), Ulster Orchestra, Jac van Steen

SOMM SOMMCD 0710 75:52 mins



Symphonies, yes; string quartets, certainly. But we haven't been trained to associate the prolific British composer David Matthews with operas. Then, in 2023, *Anna* emerged in a concert performance, with a libretto by the late philosopher Roger Scruton. Afterwards, its conductor Jac van Steen, a Matthews champion, suggested the composer create an orchestral digest of the work.

Unfortunately, *Anna: Symphonic Diptych* is a digest very hard to, well, digest. 115 minutes have been squeezed into 32; arias are now 'sung' by instruments; and the plot, concerning love and forgiveness in a central European country freed from political repression, has to be caught on the wing, if caught at all. The saving grace in music somewhat central European itself is Matthews's gift for orchestral colouring. The opera's instrumental stand-ins (oboe, clarinet, trumpet etc) breathlessly whirl past in a rapidly changing parade of characters and motifs; though not, alas, with enough finesse in recording or performance to turn *Diptych* into a brilliant if baffling concerto for orchestra.

An easier time is guaranteed with the one-movement Symphony No. 11 (2022), where Matthews's knack for breathing new life into established classical norms comes into play. The chain of loose variations includes a turbulent section inspired by Tolkein's *The Lord of the Rings*. The recent Flute Concerto acknowledges the flute's gift for pastoral caperings, though other trimmings are more arduous. A lighter touch from soloist Emma Halnan might have helped the ingredients cohere. *Geoff Brown* ★★★

Mozart

Symphonies Nos 35 & 36; Violin Concerto No.3

Aylen Pritchin (violin); Il Pomo d'Oro/Maxim Emelyanychev

Aparté AP349 79 mins

mozart · the symphonies
M

Over the past 13 years the period instrument orchestra Il Pomo d'Oro has collaboratedwith major recording labels, including Decca, DG, Harmonia Mundi, Erato and NaïveRecords. The orchestra's latest release for Aparté is the third in their cycle of the complete Mozart symphonies. The album includes the Symphony No. 35 (the 'Haffner'), the Symphony No. 36 (the 'Linz'), and the Violin Concerto No. 3.

Whilst originally conceived for Salzburg, the 'Haffner,' as premiered in Vienna in 1783, utilises the full cohort of Classical woodwinds, if only in the outer movements. Scored for smaller forces and composed in less than a week, the 'Linz' is Mozart's pragmatic response to the need for a symphonic work for imminent performance. Both symphonies are already particularly well-represented in the catalogue. Pioneering sets such as Christopher Hogwood's with AAM (Decca) and Frans Brüggen's with the Orchestra of the Eighteenth Century (Philips) set the bar high for the next generation of historical performers. Il Pomo d'Oro is certainly technically accomplished but these offerings feel more like readings than honed interpretations, often prioritising dramatic gesture at the expense of detail. In the Violin Concerto, Aylen Pritchin is virtuosic but lacks stylistic and articulatory panache, treading too inoffensive a path between current offerings on modern violin and those which are historically informed.

Amidst Il Pomo d'Oro's proclamation to offer 'outstanding quality in the field of the historical performance' the presence of a conductor in Mozart is an anachronism. This golden apple promises much but needs further ripening. *Ingrid Pearson* ★★★★

Lurking menace: conductor Michael Seal captures shadowy Bliss

Ravel

Le Tombeau de Couperin; Ma Mère l'Oye; La Valse; Boléro; etc

*Chœur de Radio France; Orchestre National de France/Cristian Măcelaru

Naïve V9018 176:46 mins (3CD)

RAVEL
ORCHESTRE NATIONAL DE FRANCE

Ravel's music is in the blood of the Orchestre National de France. The composer's music has run through its repertoire since its foundation 91 years ago. This handsome three-disc set presents ravishing performances given by the ONF and music director Cristian Măcelaru in concerts celebrating the 150th anniversary of Ravel's birth. It includes not-quite-all of the works for orchestra without soloists, the absentees being the *Valses nobles et sentimentales*, *Shéhérazade* overture and *Menuet antique*.

Such omissions frustrate merely because the playing here is wonderfully spirited. Măcelaru draws a luminous vibrancy from the strings, giving a rich shimmer to the fairy garden conclusion of *Ma mère l'oye*. His pacing is superb, especially in the ebb and flow within the broad architecture of *Daphnis et Chloé*, even if his sun rises more rapidly than most. The woodwind retain the quintessentially Gallic tang to their sound, from the plaintive bassoon at the heart of *Alborada del gracioso* to the interplay of *Le Tombeau de Couperin*. The latter features first recordings of the Fugue and Toccata, movements Ravel omitted from his orchestral version, in idiomatic versions by David Molard Soriano.

A few extremes are underplayed, the climaxes of *La valse* lacking heft while the waves of *Une barque sur l'oceán* could grow from a quieter murmur. These quibbles fall away, though, alongside moments such as the delicious interplay between drooping strings and teasing cor anglais and clarinet in the simply outstanding performance of *Rapsodie espagnole*. *Christopher Dingle* ★★★★

Tchaikovsky

Symphonies Nos 5 & 6
LPO/Karina Canellakis
LPO LPO0137 89 mins

London Philharmonic Orchestra
TCHAIKOVSKY
SYMPHONY NO. 5
SYMPHONY NO. 6 (PATHÉTIQUE)
KARINA CANELLAKIS conductor
LONDON PHILHARMONIC ORCHESTRA

It isn't easy for a conductor to come up with a fresh take on masterworks as familiar as Tchaikovsky's last two symphonies. Karina Canellakis shows, in these two live recordings, that she's up for the challenge, and there is much to like in the result.

She couldn't wish for classier playing from the London Philharmonic. In the 'Pathétique' Symphony especially, Tchaikovsky's almost wilfully intricate orchestral scoring – in its way as modern as anything from the 20th century yet written down in 1893 – still makes quite serious demands. The response here is top-flight. Canellakis's interpretations, however, don't reach the same level. There is real upside to her fairly tight-reined approach to shaping each movement, while also giving the orchestra time and scope to deliver as they do. She has a convincing way – partly calculated perhaps, but sounding happily instinctive – of now and again broadening out the pacing to let an expressive moment speak. And in the second movement of the 'Pathétique', with its oddball five-beats-to-a-bar metre and not-quite-waltz feel, she finds a lovely streak of unaffected whimsy that stays in the memory. But there's also a studied absence of risk-taking. While over-the-top melodrama should be avoided in this music, a feeling of fire in the blood is nonetheless a special part of it, and there's little sense of this quality. The Fifth Symphony's rousing final peroration underwhelms; and the Sixth's wildest moments don't have the essential, edge-of-catastrophe feeling. *Malcolm Hayes* ★★★

Ustvolskaya

Symphonies Nos 1-5
Oliver Barlow, Arlo Murray et al;
LPO/Christian Karlsen
BIS BIS-2304 87 mins

GALINA
USTVOLSKAYA
SYMPHONIES Nos 1-5

Harsh, uncompromising, fearless, austere and unyielding are amongst the most frequent adjectives that are applied to the output of Russian composer, Galina Ustvolskaya (1919–2006). But at best, this narrative, implying that Ustvolskaya's fierce strength of purpose and penchant for employing aggressive and often relentlessly repetitive musical material is merely designed to browbeat audiences into complete submission, is only a half-truth. Granted, listening in one session to all five of her symphonies would be a tough ask at the best of times. But such is the sheer originality and conviction of her ideas that it is almost impossible not to be drawn into her unique sound world.

Perhaps out of all the works, the First Symphony is the most remarkable. Like its successors, it's constructed along distinctly unconventional lines with two extended orchestral sections framing a middle movement which involves settings of socially provocative poems sung by two boys' voices. That Ustvolskaya composed such powerfully dissonant yet deeply affecting music in the Soviet Union only two years after the death of Stalin seems scarcely credible.

In Symphonies 2 to 5, written between 1979 and 1990, Ustvolskaya pares down her musical invention to essentials and employs increasingly sparse instrumental accompaniments to frame deeply spiritual, if often despairing religious texts. These are either sung conventionally, as in No. 4, or in the other works projected in a hectoring manner by a narrator.

If such descriptions sound off-putting, let me emphasise how much the mesmeric beauty of Ustvolskaya's pithy motifs manages to get under your skin, particularly when the performances from the soloists, LPO and Christian Karlsen are so committed. *Erik Levi* ★★★★

American Folklore

Works by Copland, Ellington, Bernard Rands, Christopher Theofanidis, Omar Thomas
Yale Symphony Orchestra/
William Boughton
Nimbus NI6462 76:15 mins

This album acts as a swansong for William Boughton's seven-year tenure as music director of the Yale Symphony Orchestra and also marks the ensemble's 60th birthday. The players exhibit a bold colour palette in Duke Ellington's *River Suite*, with nimble woodwind soloing. Ensemble isn't immaculate, however, with some orchestral sections 'swinging' more than others, and the distracting sound of page-turning between movements.

The suite from Copland's ballet *Billy the Kid* is next. While the hyperactive syncopations of 'Street Scene in a Frontier Town' aren't quite as sharply etched as they might be, the solo trumpet rings plaintively in 'Prairie Night', and the mawkishness of 'Celebration (After Billy's Capture)' is nicely captured. The YSO has a history of espousing new music, and three works by living composers round out the programme. Bernard Rands' Symphonic Fantasy is, at 21 minutes, the longest of these, and this is its premiere recording. Using Sibelius's Seventh Symphony as a starting point, the work has much of the Finnish composer's roiling energy, while inhabiting an often spiky, occasionally sepulchral sound world of its own. The Yale performance is shaped with clarity and conviction by conductor Boughton. The orchestral version of Omar Thomas's *Of Our New Day Begun* – written to honour the victims of the Emanuel African Methodist Episcopal Church massacre in 2015 – is also a first recording, and its neo-Ivesian amalgam of stomping, singing and refracted hymn fragments elicits a stirring response from the performers. Christopher Theofanidis's brief but impactful 'Rainbow Serpent', its textures humming with multi-layered string writing, completes the release. The recorded sound is lively, if a touch over-resonant. *Terry Blain* ★★★

BRIEF NOTES

Schreker • Korngold • Krenek **A journey through the Vienna of the 'joyful apocalypse'**

Orchestra National des Pays de la Loire/Sascha Goetzel *BIS BIS-2722*

This superb album brings together three Austrian composers who would go on to fall foul of the Nazi regime. From the mid-1910s, Korngold's Sinfonietta – written at just 15 – and Schreker's Overture to *Die Gezeichneten* are lushly, boldly Romantic, while Krenek's *Potpourri* of 1927 chucks elements such as European dance and jazz into the melting pot that its title suggests. Superb playing is matched by first-rate sound. *Jeremy Pound* ★★★★★

Prokofiev **Symphony No. 4 (1947 version)**

LSO/Gianandrea Noseda *LSO Live LSO0396-D*

In its fifth instalment of a Prokofiev symphony cycle, the LSO shines in this recording of the 1947 revised version of the Symphony No. 4. The performance balances theatrical flair with symphonic clarity, the ensemble is precise and conductor Gianandrea Noseda emphasises this monumental work's dramatic contrasts. While some might argue that the expanded version of the symphony is epic but difficult to diffuse, the LSO's interpretation makes a compelling case for its emotional scale. A bold and thoughtful reading – I recommend! *Miranda Bardsley* ★★★★★

R Strauss • Dvořák • Glazunov **R Strauss:** Ein Heldenleben; **Dvořák:** A Hero's Song; **Glazunov:** To the Memory of a Hero

Bamberg Symphony Orchestra/Jakub Hrůša *Accentus ACC30646*

This exploration of the heroism through three epic masterpieces by Strauss, Dvořák and Glazunov showcases the sprightly winds and cushioned strings of the Bamberg Symphony to luxurious effect. Conductor Jakub Hrůša maintains a sweeping sense of momentum and grandeur, and there are beautiful solos along the way, including from concertmaster Bart Vandenbogaerde in the Strauss. *Charlotte Smith* ★★★★

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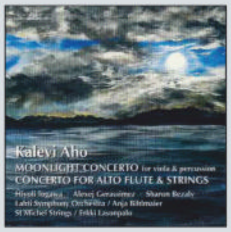
Concerto

CONCERTO CHOICE


Kalevi Aho
MOONLIGHT CONCERTO for viola & percussion
CONCERTO FOR ALTO FLUTE & STRINGS
Hiyoli Togawa · Alexej Gerassimez · Sharon Bezaly
Lahti Symphony Orchestra / Anja Bihlmaier
St Michel Strings / Erkki Lasonpalo

Spotlight on unusual solo instruments

Claire Jackson is mightily impressed by Bezaly's mastery of the rare alto flute

Kalevi Aho

Moonlight Concerto*; Concerto for Alto Flute & Strings**

*Hiyoli Togawa (viola); *Alexej Gerassimez (percussion); *Lahti Symphony Orchestra/Anja Bihlmaier; **Sharon Bezaly (flute); **St Michel Strings/Erkki Lasonpalo

BIS BIS-2626 56:20 mins

When, sometime in the last century, I joined an amateur flute choir, proximity to the extended instrument family was the main attraction. Alongside the standard 'C' model there exists the piccolo, of course, but also the lesser-spotted treble, an alto and various bass flutes. Initial excitement turned to dread as we took it in turns to play the larger iterations: requiring headache-inducing airflow and superhuman endurance, the lower flutes are very difficult to project. Such personal preamble is intended to enhance praise of Sharon Bezaly, the soloist in Kalevi Aho's 2021 alto flute concerto (originally composed for Romanian flautist Matei Ioachimescu). Aho sensibly scores the work for strings, rather than full orchestra, yet there are multiple moments where Bezaly is required to weave in and out of the ensemble – and never once falls from focus. The six movements shift from strange (*Misterioso*) to dramatic (*Furioso*); there are no breaks, instead space is provided by an eldritch interlude and a shivering epilogue. Bezaly is most impressive in the *Allegro*, swapping to a bass flute to fleck musical spittle onto a pavement of harmonics (the St Michel Strings on eerie form).

> Bezaly weaves in and out, and never once falls from focus

The unsettling ambiguity continues in Aho's 'Moonlight' Concerto (2020) for viola and percussion, here performed by Hiyoli Togawa and Alexej Gerassimez. Ostensibly the music runs in one breath, broken up by a yearning cadenza. Aho's emphasis is on timbre, and the juxtaposition of sparse lyricism and pizzicato-like percussion is consistently beautifully crafted. ★★★★★

Superhuman control: Sharon Bezaly is impressively nimble

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Beethoven

Piano Concerto No. 3; Piano Sonatas Nos 24 & 28

Karim Said; Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra/Domingo Hindoyan

Rubicon RCD1111 69:34 mins

BEETHOVEN
KARIM SAID

If the cover photo of this all-Beethoven album has the retro feel of something from the golden age of recording, the clean graphic design suggests something more modern. And that's a fair representation, too, of what listeners can expect from this album. Pianist Karim Said, an unfailingly intelligent and sensitive musician, here blends a classic feel with an appealing freshness.

As a soloist, he made his public mark at the BBC Proms over 15 years ago, with Daniel Barenboim's West-Eastern Divan Orchestra, yet this recording marks his concerto debut on disc. Said's approach is finely tuned to Beethoven's idiom, and he gives us a Third Concerto full of character and elan, while maintaining a cogent, balanced view of the whole piece. He's matched by the RLPO on fine, taut form. It's one of those performances in which, as a listener, you feel in entirely safe hands. There are no real surprises, but everything is very well done.

That also goes for the programme itself. Unlike Said's previous albums, which offered intriguing juxtapositions, this one is straight-down-the-line Beethoven and, even though each performance is well worth hearing in its own right, somehow the whole adds up to slightly less than the sum of its parts. Still, there's a ping to Said's playing that makes the Piano Sonata No. 24 sparkle, and he tells an eloquent, wordless story in the more expansive Piano Sonata No. 28. It's the highlight of the album.

Rebecca Franks ★★★★

Britten* • Tippett** • Walton***

Diversions*; Piano Concerto; Sinfonia Concertante*****

Clare Hammond (piano); BBC Symphony Orchestra/George Vass

BIS BIS-2604 80:41 mins

This is a valuable album indeed. It consists of three somewhat neglected 20th-century British works for piano and orchestra; each is ripe for rediscovery and could prove rewarding for performers and audiences in the concert hall. They receive fine performances here from the enterprising and intelligent soloist Clare Hammond, beautifully accompanied by the BBC Symphony Orchestra under George Vass.

Walton's 19-minute Sinfonia Concertante (1928) is perhaps

DAVID KORNFELD, GETTY

the least satisfying – it does not always seem more than the sum of its parts – but that is all the more reason to hear it here; Hammond brings out the best in the piece, giving it energy, gumption and a suitably acerbic edge.

Britten's *Diversions* (1942) presents a different challenge: it is for the pianist's left hand only, written (like concertos by Ravel, Korngold and Prokofiev) for Paul Wittgenstein, whose right arm was amputated after injury in the First World War. A theme and 11 'character' variations, it is packed with invention, atmosphere and clever writing for the piano, with which instrument Britten had a complex and possibly underrated relationship.

To round off, the biggest of the three is the Tippett Piano Concerto (premiered in 1956), in which the composer reinvented the Beethovenian concerto model, envisaging the piano as equal partner to the orchestral instrumentalists. The music itself veers between the patchily poetic and the slightly bonkers, much in the spirit of *The Midsummer Marriage*. Hammond and Vass rise to all its challenges, making a strong and spirited case for this big, generous-hearted sprawl. *Jessica Duchen* ★★★★

Mozart

Piano Concertos, Vol. 11

Jean-Efflam Bavouzet (piano); Manchester Camerata/Gábor Takács-Nagy

Chandos CHAN 20331 64:32 mins

In line with earlier releases, this latest instalment of Jean-Efflam Bavouzet's cycle of Mozart's piano concertos also explores some little-known musical byways, again with happy results. Here a threesome of the teenage wonder's earliest concertos is interleaved with an assortment of later and (even) earlier opera overtures, plus some of the incidental music written by the now mature master-composer (aged 21) for the play *Thamos, König in Ägypten* (Thamos, King of Egypt). Bavouzet's playing has an irrepressible quality that perfectly suits the young Mozart's idiom, while bypassing the ever-contentious issues of period-instrument style as if these have no need to exist. He uses a modern concert grand piano, the Manchester Camerata strings play with normal modern vibrato and the performances scintillate like the music itself. The three concertos are each based on a keyboard sonata by Johann Christian Bach, who was resident in London when Mozart and his family visited for a year in 1771-72. Each short work is a small feast of invention and No. 7 in E flat has the piano deployed in a deeper and more sonorous register than its brighter-coloured siblings, a contrast that Bavouzet skilfully brings out. Among the orchestral numbers, the *Thamos* music is strikingly expressive and dramatic. And the overture to the opera *Ascanio in Alba*, written when its composer was 15, gets the programme off to a sparkling start. *Malcolm Hayes* ★★★★★

Telemann

Violin Concertos

Isabelle Faust; Akademie für Alte Musik Berlin/Bernhard Forck

Harmonia Mundi HMM902756

79:35 mins

This somewhat irregular musical sequence is foremost designed as a showcase for Isabelle Faust's virtuosity. The most extended of the pieces is Telemann's Ouverture-Suite in B minor, containing a prominent role for solo violin. Telemann was an acknowledged master of the form and here is a rewarding one with a finely crafted Overture, an affecting *Loure* and two attractive *Menuets*. Of comparable interest are the Violin Concerto in A minor, with its beguiling introductory *Adagio*, and the D major Concerto for violin, trumpet, cello and strings whose ample surviving source material suggests that it was a popular number in its time.

Compared with these three works the A major Violin Concerto, of questionable authenticity, is an anticlimax. Subtitled 'Die Relinge' ('The Frogs'), its opening *Allegro* caters generously for imitative cacophony which does not lend itself well to repeated hearing. The remaining orchestral item is a Sonata in D major for trumpet and strings, where soloist Ute Hartwich's lightly articulated playing delights.

A feast of invention: Jean-Efflam Bavouzet is skillful in early Mozart

The pieces which complete the programme feature unaccompanied violin(s). The little 'Gulliver's Travels' Suite is included in Telemann's enterprising periodical *Der Getreue Music-Meister*, while the Fantasia in B minor is intended for transverse flute. Why Faust should have chosen this in preference to one from a similar set by Telemann for violin is a mystery. Lastly is a Canon for two violins, now attributed to Quantz.

Faust's playing, as ever is alluring and she is affectionately complemented by the Akademie für Alte Musik, Berlin directed by violinist Bernhard Forck. *Nicholas Anderson* ★★★★

Concertos & Movements

Works by Shamo, Ole Schmidt and Anders Koppel

Bjarke Mogensen (accordion); Aarhus Kammerorkester/Magnus Plejdrup et al

Orchid Classics ORC100393 51:20 mins

On the face of it, the relatively limited dynamic range and somewhat restrictive timbres of the accordion would surely inhibit its capability of acting as a really effective solo instrument working in tandem with an orchestra. Yet the sequence of works featured here makes a mockery of such assertions. Each of the composers in their different ways manages to create a surprisingly imaginative sound world, establishing a constructive dialogue in which accordion and the varied orchestral forces emerge as truly equal partners.

Of course, the impact of the music is immeasurably enhanced by Bjarke Mogensen's dazzling playing. This superb Danish performer scurries through some of the breathtakingly fast passage work in all three works with outrageous ease and particularly in the Ole Schmidt Second Concerto, projects the musical ideas with a good deal of humour.

But Mogensen is not only preoccupied with virtuosity. In the melodically attractive Concerto for Accordion and String Orchestra by Ukrainian composer Ihor Shamo, he exhibits a quite masterful control of individual contrapuntal lines in the Fuga movement, and brings a tender expressively contoured sound to the nostalgically romantic melody of the ensuing Aria.

It's not entirely clear from the booklet notes as to why Mogensen elects to perform only the second and third movements from the Second Concerto by Anders Koppel. However, the pairing seems to work very convincingly, since the second movement is a quite lengthy solo cadenza covering a wide variety of moods and technical high jinks which acts as an effective prelude to the exuberant and rhythmically playful finale. *Erik Levi* ★★★★

Opera & Stage

OPERA CHOICE

J.A. HASSE
Piramo e Tisbe
Akademie für Alte Musik Berlin
Bernhard Forck

A compelling revival of Hasse's tragic masterpiece

Anett Fritsch, Roberta Mameli and Jeremy Ovenden deliver vivid performances, notes ***Nicholas Kenyon***

Star power: Anett Fritsch steps into the part of Piramo with flair

KATERINA KEPKA, SIMON PAULY

Hasse

Piramo e Tisbe

Anett Fritsch, Roberta Mameli, Jeremy Ovenden et al; Akademie für Alte Musik Berlin/Bernhard Forck
Harmonia Mundi HMM905393.94 102 mins (2CD)

Johann Hasse (1699-1783) is a fascinating figure: one of the most successful opera composers of the 18th century, he links the worlds of Bach and Mozart (whose early Ascanio in Alba upstaged Hasse's last opera in 1771), while also marrying the star soprano Faustina Bordoni.

The story of *Pyramus and Thisbe* is most familiar to us from the hilarious parody created by Shakespeare for the 'rude mechanicals' in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, but this late 'intermezzo tragico' by Hasse is a setting of the real tragedy, to a libretto by Marco Coltellini which draws out all the Romeo-and-Juliet passion and misunderstandings in the sad story.

Hasse responded to the libretto with a most unusual and forward-looking score for three soloists, weaving together a work which repeatedly links arias and ensembles, creating dramatic accompanied recitatives as well as plangent duets.

The piece has been recorded before by La Stagione Frankfurt, but this new version is better, with livelier tempi and superb singing from two bright-voiced sopranos, Anett Fritsch and Roberta Mameli, in the title roles – even if it is sometimes difficult to tell them apart without close attention to the libretto.

The third singer is Thisbe's father (Il padre), Jeremy Ovenden, who is left so despairing by her death that he kills himself in the closing moments. As a sample of Hasse's eloquence, the aria 'Perderò l'amato bene' is most affecting, and the lovers' last duet in the most unusual key of B major is very touching. The Berliners' playing of the colourful score is vivid and incisive. ★★★★★

> Hasse's score for three soloists is most unusual and forward-looking

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Donizetti

Don Pasquale

Roberto de Candia, Giulia Mazzola et al; Coro dell'Accademia Teatro alla Scala, Orchestra Donizetti Opera/ Iván López-Reynoso et al (DVD)
Dynamic DVD DYN38067 122:48 mins

DONIZETTI
Don Pasquale
DYNAMIC

Don Pasquale represents Donizetti at his most accessible: an amusing story about teaching a vain man a lesson, with a plethora of gorgeous melodies. It has been treated to many memorable productions, notably Jonathan Miller's 2004 'doll's house' version. Director Amélie Niermeyer's contemporary new staging for the Bergamo Donizetti Opera Festival is, alas, rather harder to love.

Don Pasquale is a nouveau-riche, pampered fool in leopard-print who resides in a tropical resort. Ernesto has a buzz cut and gold chains; Norina with tasteless outfits lives out of the back of her car. So far so funny, but the staging is sometimes dark, the use of the chorus contrived and the appearance of a plush pink elephant is baffling. Singers are also sometimes sub-optimally positioned on stage. Accompanying 'Povero Ernesto' with a busking trumpeter loitering next to a bin is, however, effective.

It's a pity the singers are working against directorial decisions that don't always work, because much of the singing is first-rate. Roberto de Candia is not the visually funniest Don Pasquale, but he performs his high-speed patter with bravura, as does the impressive young baritone Dario Sogos as Dottor Malatesta. Javier Camarena (Ernesto) is the production's big name and his singing is gorgeously elegiac. But the revelation is Giulia Mazzola, a member (like Sogos) of the festival's young artist scheme, a sparky actress who convinces as a working-class confidence trickster but sings with the most tender, expressive lyric soprano imaginable. One to watch. *Alexandra Wilson* ★★★

Handel

Giulio Cesare

Christophe Dumaux, Julie Fuchs, Cecilia Molinari et al; Le Concert d'Astrée/Emmanuelle Haim
Naxos DVD 2110779 191:27 mins

Handel's Italian-language operatic take on the Caesar and Cleopatra story was an instant hit in 1724, and it's gone on resonating ever since: directed by David McVicar in 2005 as a seamless marriage of high tragedy and camp comedy, it's become Glyndebourne's most popular show ever. It may be loosely based on history, but it's pure Baroque fantasy.

Director Calixto Bieito and his designer Rebecca Ringst give the opening scene – in which Pompeo's severed head is produced from a plastic shopping bag – a suitably horror-film start, with Pompeo's widow Cornelia (Teresa Iervolino) and her son Sesto (Cecilia Molinari) collapsing in shock and grief. These two superb mezzos continue to dominate the action, with Sesto's thirst for revenge triggering the course of the drama. Meanwhile, Cleopatra (soprano Julie Fuchs) wants to get Cesare (countertenor Christophe Dumaux) into her bed, and as a virtuoso coquette reckons, her charms will do the trick.

The first 90 minutes of this long production provide precious little visual pleasure, as the characters negotiate a vast transparent box which endlessly twists and turns. But when we reach Cesare's personal harem, the stage becomes a feast of variegated lighting effects, and remains so until the end. Dumaux's singing is disappointingly colourless, but Fuchs's is a delight.

As are the orchestra and chorus under Emmanuelle Haim – Handel turns every second of the score into Shakespearean magic. But we do have to put up with a great deal of all-in wrestling from the cast, as dramatic subtlety is not Bieito's forte. *Michael Church* ★★★

Mozart

Idomeneo

Andrew Staples, Magdalena Kožená, Sabine Devieilhe et al; Bavarian Radio Choir, Bavarian Radio Symphony Orchestra/Simon Rattle

BR Klassik 900215 179:13 mins (3CD)

Idomeneo is sometimes seen as Mozart's attempt to breathe life into the tired opera seria form – a 'serious' style of opera that wrapped high falutin themes around historical episodes and legends from the Classical world. But when Mozart presented *Idomeneo* to the Elector of Bavaria in 1781, opera seria was still very much alive. Gluck had been developing it in Paris, and Mozart's *La Clemenza di Tito* (1791) was also an opera seria.

Mozart grasped the chance to compose choruses, marches and ballet music for the Munich premiere, and he took advantage of the presence of the famous Mannheim orchestra to include flutes, oboes, clarinets and bassoons in the score. The Bavarian Radio Symphony Orchestra under Simon Rattle's energetic and sensitive direction mirror the Mannheimers' dynamism and virtuosity. The prominent playing of a harpsichord rather than a fortepiano in the continuo adds to the aural brilliance.

Andrew Staples is a soft-toned Idomeneo, the King of Crete who must sacrifice his son Idamante to placate the god Neptune. He brings fine diction and expressivity to every phrase. Magdalena Kožená is a stand-out Idamante – vocally exquisite and dramatically compelling. Sabine Devieilhe is graceful as Ilia, the Trojan princess and Idamante's love interest, while Elsa Dreisig gives a heartfelt and insightful performance as her rival Elettra. Only Linard Vrielink, as Arbace, struggles to navigate Mozart's complex vocal lines and mount the top notes. The live concert recording from Munich's Residenz is clear and resonant. *John-Pierre Joyce* ★★★★

Vivaldi

La Gloria e Imeneo

Teresa Iervolino et al; Abchordis Ensemble/Andrea Buccarella

Naive OP8877 48:80 mins

La Gloria e Imeneo is the least often encountered of Vivaldi's three surviving Serenatas, or dramatic cantatas. It dates from 1725 when it was commissioned by the French ambassador to Venice to celebrate the marriage of Louis XV to the Polish princess Maria Leszczyńska, which had taken place at Fontainebleau in September.

The piece is on a more modest scale than the remaining serenatas, fielding two allegorical characters, Gloria and Hymenaeus, and an ensemble of strings and continuo. Not all of the music was newly composed, and some readers will enjoy being reacquainted with arias from operas from the composer's pen, as they will also recognise two numbers which would reappear in the serenata *La Senna festeggiante*. No introductory sinfonia has survived but, instead, the serenata is introduced by one of Vivaldi's string concertos a quattro, RV138.

The music is more or less evenly distributed, though it is Gloria, who has the two most memorable arias. One of them, 'Al seren d'amica calma' forever haunts our imagination and sensibilities while the other, 'Ognor colmi' has an irresistible gentilesse and expressive warmth. The tempo here, though, feels a little hard driven. Teresa Iervolino and countertenor Carlo Vistoli deliver all with fervour and an assured understanding of Vivaldi's vocal requirements, while Andrea Buccarella's sparkling direction is all that one could wish for. *Nicholas Anderson* ★★★★

Vocal powerhouse: Jennifer Holloway commands the role of Senta in Wagner's *Der fliegende Holländer*

Wagner

Der fliegende Holländer

Brian Mulligan, Jennifer Holloway et al; Netherlands Radio Choir, Hong Kong Philharmonic Chorus and Orchestra/Jaap van Zweden

Naxos 8660572-73 130:79 mins (2CD)

Der Fliegender Holländer is everything an 1840s opera ought to be. A gothic ghost story with its roots in Weber's *Der Freischütz*, three acts with distinct musical numbers and a front of stage role for the chorus. Yet it's unmistakably Wagnerian, in the pit and in the theme of redemptive love.

This recording by the admirable Hong Kong Philharmonic Orchestra conducted by Jaap van Zweden includes all of the composer's revisions from 1842 to 1880. And while the sound is sometimes boxy in what was evidently a concert performance, and there are intrusive effects like a creaky wind machine, it fields a fine cast.

Brian Mulligan's Dutchman is about as good as you get nowadays with thrilling drops into a gravelly lower register. His opening monologue bypasses fashionable Freudian self-analysis: it's an anguished yet defiant assertion of his destiny to sail the seven seas for seven years before making land and finding salvation in a woman's love.

The American soprano Jennifer Holloway is an unsentimental Senta, who manages the changes of emotional tone in her Act Two ballad to great effect. You never doubt the logic of her sacrifice. If Bryan Register's Erik is stretched in the upper register, Ain Anger's Daland – a thankless role – is steady as a rock. Better still are the chorus, the Netherlands Radio Choir and the Hong Kong Philharmonic Chorus. Each member on point at every moment and a collective character in their own right in the drama. *Christopher Cook* ★★★★

Choral

CHORAL CHOICE

London Philharmonic Orchestra
TIPPETT
A CHILD OF OUR TIME

A heartfelt and beautiful performance for our time

Tippett's meditation on inhumanity is as relevant today as at its premiere, writes ***Christopher Dingle***

Measure of the work: Edward Gardner and the LPO capture Tippett's troubling vision perfectly

Tippett

A Child of Our Time

Nadine Benjamin, Sarah Connolly, Kenneth Tarver, Roderick Williams; London Philharmonic Choir; London Adventist Chorale; London Philharmonic Orchestra/Edward Gardner

LPO LPO0136 65:27 mins

'The world turns on its dark side'. Tippett would have been entirely happy if his text for *A Child of Our Time* was now irrelevant. Prompted by the November 1938 anti-Jewish violence in Nazi Germany that came to be known as Kristallnacht, this secular oratorio is a more universal examination of inhumanity. Historic individuals, notably the Jewish refugee Herschel Grynszpan and Ernst vom Rath, the German diplomat whose shooting sparked the horrendous Nazi retributions, become 'the boy' and 'the official' respectively.

The chorus are the real stars in a performance of devastating beauty

The London Philharmonic Orchestra gave the oratorio's premiere in 1944, and it is clear from this 2022 performance that current principal conductor Edward Gardner more than has the measure of this idiosyncratic, yet compelling work. Tenor Kenneth Tarver is suitably affecting as 'the boy', mezzo-soprano Sarah Connolly and baritone Roderick Williams draw out the text's emotional nuances, while Nadine Benjamin soars radiantly. The chorus are the real stars of this work, though, and the London Philharmonic Choir are on top form. They are supplemented by the London Adventist Chorale, who imbue the spirituals with a profound, quiet fervour to cap a performance of devastating, heartfelt beauty.

Tippett knew that, despite everything, ending with hope was essential. It still is. More than 80 years since the oratorio's premiere, this stirring performance reflects the fact that, sadly, this is very much a work of our time. ★★★★★

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MARK ALLAN, FELIX BROEDE

M Haydn

Requiem; Missa Sancti Hieronymi

Choir of Gonville & Caius College, Cambridge; Academy of Ancient Music/Matthew Martin

Linn Records CKD771 70:26 mins

Unlike his elder brother Joseph, Michael Haydn was renowned in his day for his church music above all, and both Mozart and Schubert were among his admirers. His Requiem of 1771 was written in memory of his employer, the Prince-Archbishop of Salzburg, and perhaps also of his own daughter, who died in infancy that year. Its austere scoring lacks woodwinds, but features trumpets, trombones and timpani, plus strings restricted to violins and basses. It's an impressive piece, particularly in its opening section, whose grief-stricken atmosphere may well have influenced the corresponding movement of Mozart's unfinished Requiem; and the Agnus Dei, where the individual soloists alternate with interjections from the chorus. This new performance is well paced by the conductor, Matthew Martin, though the Academy of Ancient Music's violins could have done with a touch more presence.

No such problem in the *Missa Sancti Hieronymi*, which dispenses with strings altogether, and instead has prominent parts for two solo oboes, with another pair of the same instruments in an orchestra that again has trombones reinforcing the chorus. After a surprisingly cheerful opening Kyrie, the sections of the Mass that leave perhaps a stronger impression include the 'Qui tollis', with its forceful chromatic writing in octaves; the 'Quoniam', which is punctuated by isolated percussive orchestral outbursts; and the Agnus Dei, whose expressive melody constantly intermingles soloists and chorus. The Choir of Gonville and Caius College, Cambridge, and the four soloists – all ex-members of the Choir – provide fine contributions to this enterprising venture.

Misha Donat ★★★★

Monteverdi

Il sesto libro de madrigali

RossoPorpora/Walter Testolin

Arcana A580 73:33 mins

Monteverdi's Sixth Book of Madrigals (1614) straddles two musical eras. Its five-voice polyphonic textures are steeped in Renaissance traditions, yet the emotional scope is new. Moments of introspection are punctuated with naked cries of pain, bringing a sense of drama that verges on the operatic.

Setting the melancholic tone for the collection is the *Lamento d'Arianna*, the sole surviving fragment of Monteverdi's opera *L'Arianna*. Though less personal in its madrigal guise, Ariadne's repeated cry of 'Lasciatemi morire' ('Let me die!') retains its sense of anguish. Equally affecting is the *Sestina* (*Lagrime d'amante*), written for Caterina Martinelli, the young soprano lost to smallpox before she could create the role of Arianna. Around these, Monteverdi places contrasting pieces: *Zefiro torna* breathes an airy wistfulness, while *Presso un fiume tranquillo* meanders through Arcadian landscapes.

RossoPorpora, the Italian vocal ensemble founded and directed by the bass and Monteverdi specialist Walter Testolin, has built a well-deserved reputation for stylish performances of Renaissance music. Here, the nine vocalists, all persuasive soloists as well as superb ensemble singers, give us singing of clarity, beauty and refinement, underpinned by a five-strong ensemble of keyboard continuo and strings. Testolin's pacing feels natural and unexaggerated, though occasionally I found myself craving a wilder edge in moments where the pent-up emotional intensity is begging the music to break free of its formal frame.

Arcana's recorded sound is generous while preserving the intricate detail of these miniatures. Compared with ensembles that unleash the drama in Monteverdi's madrigals with more expressive colour and vigour, RossoPorpora brings heart-stopping subtlety and sensitivity to these intimate portraits of love and yearning.
Ashutosh Khandekar ★★★★

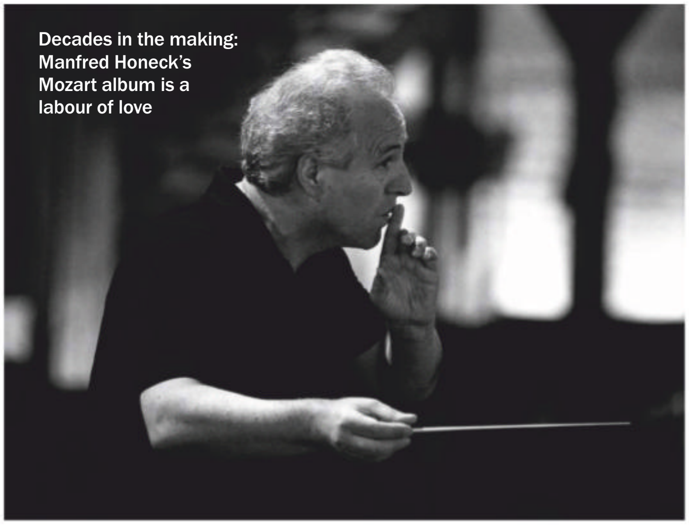
Mozart

Requiem: Mozart's Death in Words and Music
Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestra/
Manfred Honeck
Reference FR-761 60:13 mins

It is doubtless hard to get the go-ahead nowadays for new readings of core repertoire, but one way to do so is to give a familiar work a novel spin. This recording documents a venture that music director Manfred Honeck has been undertaking for decades: presenting performances of Mozart's Requiem with its movements preceded by and interspersed with Gregorian chant, other works by the composer on the theme of death, and poignant readings by F Murray Abraham, *Amadeus*'s Salieri. Honeck invites us to hear the Requiem not as a concert piece, then, but as it might be presented in a funereal context.

It's an interesting experiment. All the supplementary performances, whether musical or spoken, are filled with pathos and drama, but I can't help wondering whether the concept worked more vividly in the concert hall, or better still in a church. Stripped of visual elements, interruptions to the Requiem can detract from its drama, particularly where the dynamic segue between the Kyrie and the Dies Irae is broken.

If you can overlook this, Honeck's is an exciting performance of the Requiem, with a crisp Kyrie, a nimble-footed Domine Jesu and a Dies Irae, which, though played and sung with absolute precision, evokes a whirlwind of terrifying turmoil. He foregrounds instrumental details, sometimes allowing his singers to shimmer in the background like a celestial chorus, then raising the roof with a blazing 'Rex', as if uttered by a thousand voices. Insightful sleeve-notes explain Honeck's approach to interpreting each movement.
Alexandra Wilson ★★★★



Decades in the making: Manfred Honeck's Mozart album is a labour of love

Mozart* • Fazil Say**

Requiem*; Mozart & Mevlana**
Fatma Said et al; Rundfunkchor Berlin, Luzerner Sinfonieorchester/
Michael Sanderling
Warner Classics 2173275472 64:37 mins

MOZART
REQUIEM
FAZIL SAY
MOZART
& MEVLANA

When the Turkish pianist-composer Fazil Say (born 1970) was asked to write a piece to go alongside Mozart's Requiem, he turned to the 13th-century Persian-Turkish poet-mystic Mevlânâ Celâleddîn-i Rûmî, known in the West by his last name.

He selected two poems: 'Yine Gel' or 'Come again', which Say describes as 'a humanist call to action, an appeal for kindness', and 'Yedi Öğüt' ('The Seven Principles'), which likens 'virtuous modes of human conduct to forces of nature'.

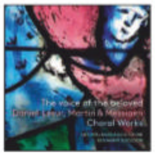
To the orchestration of Mozart's Requiem (heard in the Süssmayr completion), Say adds two Turkish instruments, the ney (an end-blown reed flute associated with Sufi ritual practice), and the kudüm (a pair of small kettle drums), played by Burcu Karadağ and Aykut Köselerli respectively. And he also incorporates Mozartian material.

Some 23 minutes in length, the result is attractive, colourful, harmonically rich, rhapsodic in manner and at times surprisingly punchy, somewhat belying its overall message of unity and a spiritual coming together.

Using modern instruments, the Mozart enters a crowded field and is most memorable for its impressive set of soloists – Fatma Said, Marianne Crebassa, Pene Pati and Alexandros Stavrakakis, though Sanderling's Luzerner Sinfonieorchester is taut and disciplined. *George Hall* ★★★

The Voice of the Beloved

Choral works by Daniel-Lesur, Martin & Messiaen
Netherlands Radio Choir/
Benjamin Goodson
Pentatone PTC5187402 50:34 mins



Benjamin Goodson and the Netherlands Radio Choir bring together three beguiling visions of sacred love and all its mysteries in this vocally challenging, beautifully conceived *a capella* programme. Frank Martin's Mass for Double Choir has emotional depths beneath its austere surface. From the outset, there's a luminous confidence in the Dutch singers' sound, as the two choirs ebb and flow in their antiphonal exchanges. The Gloria dances with playfulness and joy. The Credo has a declamatory brio and beautifully judged dynamics. The Sanctus floats, buoyed by the radiance of the singing, contrasting with the breathless intensity of the Benedictus and Hosanna sections. The Agnus suffers here from a briskness of delivery that keeps its darker mysteries under wraps.

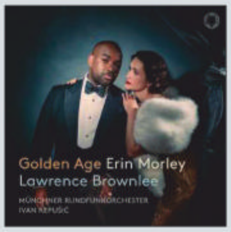
Jean Yves Daniel-Lesur's *Le Cantique des cantiques* is especially welcome. These settings capture the sensuality of the *Song of Songs* in glimmering, voluptuous 12-part textures that bring the solo voices from the choir to the fore. Goodson and his singers never over-indulge, allowing the drama to speak for itself in the swooning intimacy of 'Le Jardin clos', the feverish restlessness of 'Le Songe' and the joyous clamour of the 'Épithalame'.

Messiaen's *O sacrum convivium* acts as a meditative coda to the programme, its suspended harmonies hovering in the air.

Pentatone's recording provides the warmth and space that this music needs. At just over 50 minutes the disc feels on the short side, but the concentrated intensity of the Netherlands Chamber Choir's singing keeps you absorbed throughout.
Ashutosh Khandekar ★★★★

Vocal

VOCAL CHOICE



Performances equal to the great icons of the past

Morley and Brownlee are on sensational form in 19th-century arias and duets, writes *George Hall*

Perfect partners: Lawrence Brownlee and Erin Morley are on fabulous form

DARIO ACOSTA

Golden Age

Works by Donizetti, Rossini, Bizet et al

Erin Morley; Lawrence Brownlee; Münchner Rundfunkorchester; Ivan Repušić

Pentatone PTC5187400 62:53 mins

In operatic history, the term 'Golden Age' is used to refer to an almost legendary period of glamorous stars with exceptional voices and impregnable techniques, always placed some considerable distance from the present day.

But in selecting the repertoire for this recording from works by Rossini, Donizetti, Verdi, Bizet and Delibes, the artists involved – soprano Erin Morley and tenor Lawrence Brownlee – show themselves at their respective peaks, and also remind listeners that singers of this mythical quality can be heard today.

Each of them delivers two solo arias while also joining in five duets. Some of the repertoire is familiar: Morley delivers a peerless 'Caro nome' from *Rigoletto*, while duetting to perfection with Brownlee in 'Tornami a dir' from Donizetti's *Don Pasquale*.

More unusual are fine accounts of extracts from Rossini's *Le comte Ory*, Bizet's *Les pêcheurs de perles* and Delibes *Lakmé*, while more obscure are those from Bizet's *La jolie fille de Perth* and Donizetti's *Marino Faliero*. Throughout, Brownlee's fluid, still youthful tenor offsets Morley's light, bright-toned soprano in a manner close to ideal.

> Both singers are fully signed up to the stylistic demands involved

Both singers are completely unfazed by the technical challenges made by the composers involved and are equally fully signed up to the stylistic demands involved; words are perfectly articulated and the crucial high notes perfectly produced.

The result is a vocal partnership delivering a high level of *bel canto* sophistication with spirit and savoir faire, accompanied perfectly by the Munich orchestra and conductor Ivan Repušić. ★★★★★

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Alfvén

Complete Orchestral Songs

Kerstin Avemo, Sabina Bisholt (sopranos), Tobias Westman (tenor), Karl-Magnus Fredriksson (baritone); The Göteborg Opera Orchestra/ Patrik Ringborg

dB Productions dBCD218 75:54 mins

Beyond his native Sweden Hugo Alfvén has been overshadowed by other Scandinavian nationalist composers. However, audiences have always had a soft spot for the First Swedish Rhapsody from 1903. Alfvén's five symphonies are recorded, and now comes a complete set of his orchestral songs.

Composed for piano and soloist, Alfvén orchestrated his songs for financial reasons and for particular singers. It's an unmistakably late Romantic landscape – love and death, twilight in the forests, the heart and its betrayals. His confident orchestral style tips its hat to Richard Strauss, who Alfvén outlived by eleven years, and Gustav Mahler. With its sombre gong, the opening of *En båt med blommor* (A Boat with Flowers), handsomely sung by the baritone Karl-Magnus Fredriksson, suggests the final movement *Das Lied von der Erde*.

Yet there's little of Mahler's scrupulous attention to the words. Alfvén is more interested in tone painting than text. 'Gammalt kväde från Hälsingland', a traditional ballad is embroidered with the sound of the wind in the trees. In *Serenad (Lindagull)*, the tenor Tobias Westman contends with quivering strings while a celesta dances fireflies into the song. The soprano Sabina Bisholt battles bells in 'Var stilla hjärta' (Be Still) and Kerstin Avemo competes with an orchestral nightingale in *Taltrasten*.

These are songs that belong to the orchestra, the highly useful Göteborg Opera Orchestra, conducted by Patrick Ringborg, as much as to the singers.
Christopher Cook ★★★

Schubert

Quintette imaginaire

Sandrine Piau (soprano), Quatuor Psophos

Alpha Classics ALPHA1157 66:40 mins

This is a curious collection. Soprano Sandrine Piau has joined forces with a string quartet – the Quatuor Psophos – to perform ten songs by Schubert whose piano accompaniments have been skilfully arranged by Jacques Gandard.

In addition, there are two substantial instrumental movements, the *Andante* from the so-called 'Death and the Maiden' Quartet, D810 (nearly 15 minutes long), based on the song of the same name; and the *Quartettsatz* (D703, nine minutes), which has no connection to any Schubert song.

Both come over well, especially 'Death and the Maiden', which is an atmospheric though scarcely outstanding realisation of a much-recorded piece.

The songs themselves are less satisfactory, partly due to the current vocal abilities of the soprano, 58 at the time of the recording: there is an occasional sense of strain, and the voice is limited in both size and colouristic range.

The most successful items are the four so-called Mignon songs, all sung by the eponymous childlike character in Goethe's novel *Wilhelm Meisters Flegeljahre*, which capture her innocence and vulnerability, each of which receives an apt, inward-looking performance.

The weakest are those, such as *Der Jüngling und der Tod* and especially *Erlkönig*, which require the singer to embody the voices of different characters – four in all in the latter; this is scarcely achieved, while many of the other items lack similar authority. *George Hall* ★★

Everything You've Ever Lived

Songs by Bacharach, Britten, O'Connor, Ravel et al

Lotte Betts-Dean (vocals), Dimitris Soukaras (guitar)

Delphian DCD34348 61:21 mins

Reading the liner notes of this debut from mezzo-soprano Lotte Betts-Dean and guitarist Dimitris Soukaras, it feels a little as though themes – sleep, nostalgia and memory – have been retrofitted to fit a wildly eclectic programme. 'We didn't have a clear set idea from the get-go,' Betts-Dean admits. Whether or not the thematic links are convincing, however, the listening experience itself conjures precisely the atmosphere they hoped to evoke.

We drift calmly across genres, hardly noticing abrupt shifts in style thanks to the tempered and understated delivery. Betts-Dean's lyrical mezzo floats wistfully above the texture. With a rich lower range and a more reedy upper register, her voice pairs nicely with the more carefree works, such as the opening Brazilian bossa nova tune and the trio of pieces from De Falla's *Siete canciones populares españolas*. But the pair also tackle lounge-style arrangements of 'Blue Moon' and Burt Bacharach's 'A House Is Not a Home' in light, charming fashion, never saccharine or over-stylised. This is aided by an intimate, live-feeling recorded quality from Delphian.

The album segues fairly seamlessly into songs by Ravel and Debussy, with Betts-Dean's woody vocals tightened up but kept in a similarly dreamy sound world. Contemporary pop and art songs like Caroline Polachek's 2019 'Go as a Dream' and Sinead O'Connor's 1987 'Jackie' might not offer a great deal above and beyond the originals, but most of the programme benefits from the pair's reframing, thoughtfully transcribed for voice and guitar. *Freya Parr* ★★★

Songs of Passion

Songs by Purcell, Dowland

Lea Desandre (mezzo-soprano), Thomas Dunford (lute)

Erato 2173282845 85:88 mins

Passion, in all its guises, is the thread that binds this wide-ranging programme devoted to two of England's greatest composers. Across two discs, the performers shed any hint of 'whitewashed' English restraint, fathoming Dowland's twilight world and Purcell's exuberant theatricality.

The Dowland disc interlaces solo and consort songs with pavans and galliards. Dunford shapes the vocal consorts with expressive freedom, bending tempi and stretching phrases to let the texts breathe. Words are crisply delivered – though the singers' vibrato, emphatic accents and dynamic swells verge on the mannered. Instrumental highlights include four *Lachrimae* pavans, sustained with measured poise by the Jupiter instrumentalists, their velvet textures finely embroidered by Dunford's exquisite lute. Of the solo works, *Sorrow, stay* and *Flow my tears* are among the set's most compelling: Lea Desandre's liquid, sensuous mezzo – shifting through a kaleidoscope of timbres – brings radiance to Dowland's shadows.

Tasteful elegance: Rowan Pierce sheds light on neglected works

The Purcell disc captures the composer's mercurial spirit, veering from madcap dances to soul-baring laments. The ensemble revels in headlong accounts of *Strike the viol* and *Now the night is chased away*, before withdrawing into the stillness of *O Solitude* and *The Evening Hymn*. A sequence from *Dido and Aeneas* closes the set, Desandre moving effortlessly from the urgency of 'Ah! Belinda!' to the stark desolation of 'When I am laid in earth', delivered with pristine diction and raw emotional intensity. *Kate Bolton-Porciatti* ★★★★

Tra le fiamme

Works by JS Bach, Handel and Vivaldi

Rowan Pierce (soprano); Florilegium/ Ashley Solomon

Channel Classics CCS47625 64 mins

Despite its title, *Tra le fiamme* ('Through the flames') is not an album centered upon violent passions, or a narrative idea, or even a particular patron or institution. It is a display of some neglected music tastefully and elegantly performed. Rowan Pierce is an accomplished singer with a growing international reputation. Ashley Solomon is in charge of historically aware performance at the Royal College of Music and is an acclaimed performer in his own right.

The opening work, Handel's Concerto Grosso, Op.3 No.3, receives a translucent recording. We can hear the imitative voices respond to each other and, although the bass line is doubled throughout, it does not swamp the sound. In the swiftly flowing second movement, Solomon's playing (on a Gedney boxwood flute from 1760) is mercurial and impressive. Rowan Pierce shows her understanding of the differing Baroque styles of the two secular cantatas here by Handel and Bach (*Tra le fiamme* and 'Ich bin in mir vernügt'). Handel's courtly item attracts modest formality and discrete ornamentation in the da capo arias. Bach's 'domestic' work has typically intricate 'instrumental' writing for the voice. In the first aria, Pierce's breath control easily matches the long phrases (including a note held for eight bars on a single syllable), and in the third aria ('Meine Seele') the angularity and harmonic twists of the line are negotiated with aplomb, though with a somewhat dry tone. The concluding Vivaldi *Alleluia* is pithy and has the weirdest word setting you are likely to come across. *Anthony Pryer* ★★★★★

Chamber

CHAMBER CHOICE

A rich score drawn from wanderings in America

Kate Wakeling is captivated by the Partch Ensemble's compelling realisation of a truly original body of works

Go your own way: Partch Ensemble breathe life into *The Wayward*

Partch

The Wayward
Partch Ensemble
Bridge BRIDGE9611 55:10 mins

Harry Partch was that rare thing of a true original. Born in California in 1901, Partch went on to create his own musical scale, construct his own (highly idiosyncratic) musical instruments and compose some of the strangest and most delightful music of the 20th century. This glorious disc from the Partch Ensemble brings to life one of Partch's most intriguing and affecting series of works, *The Wayward*, in a world premiere recording.

Partch describes *The Wayward* as 'a collection of musical compositions based on the spoken and written words of hobos and other characters – the result of my wanderings in the Western part of the United States from 1935 to 1941'. This recording brings together, for the first time, all five pieces that comprise the 'collection'. These range from the eight-movement work *Barstow*, which features lively spoken text (based on hitchhiker inscriptions from a highway railing in Barstow) heard above a spritely band of Partch's custom instruments, to the more melancholy piece *San Francisco*, which evokes the chill of the city's mist.

It is a treat to hear so many of Partch's original instruments on the album, including the Cloud Chamber Bowls (suspended perspex bowls struck with a beater), the Chromelodeon (a pump organ, retuned to fit Partch's scale system) and the Castor and Pollux (a zither-like instrument with 44 strings). Instrumental performances throughout the record are precise and richly musical, while the vocal lines, which often teeter between the spoken and the sung, are delivered with terrific charm. It is a pleasure indeed to encounter music so alive with imagination and performed with such poise. ★★★★★

> *The Wayward* is one of Partch's most intriguing and affecting series of works

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FELIX SALAZAR, ROBERT TICHÝ

Bacewicz

String Quartet No. 4, Piano Quintet No. 1
Karski Quartet; Jâms Coleman (piano)
Evil Penguin Classic EPRC0078
52:38 mins

This fine recording illuminates the still largely underappreciated chamber music of Grażyna Bacewicz, Poland's national treasure, both a virtuoso violinist and highly-regarded composer during the 20th century. The Karski Quartet and pianist Jâms Coleman deliver gripping interpretations of her Piano Quintet No. 1 (1952) and String Quartet No. 4 (1951), works that exemplify Bacewicz's synthesis of contrasting movements and moods, extended melodic lines and her oscillation between tonal and modal harmonies, all punctuated by moments of abstraction.

The piano quintet is an emotional rollercoaster, opening with atmospheric textures before building to a magnificently intense third movement. The string colours of the Karskis are often silvery and transparent, beautifully matched by Coleman's layered, colouristic playing (balance works well throughout this demanding work). Despite much bleakness, the work contains both humour and pathos, culminating in a thrilling *Con Passione* finale that showcases imaginative, cheeky textures – here handled with virtuosity. The music evokes mid-century devastation and industrially-tinged despair.

The String Quartet No. 4 opens with sinister quiet, and unfolds with formal spaciousness through a variety of moods. Particularly moving is her use of the cello's rich voice, while the second movement dreams and mutters before a witty, dancelike finale. The inclusion of a traditional folk song arrangement – actually sung! – provides a perfect, unexpectedly touching conclusion to this illuminating and emotionally powerful recording.

The recording's grainy, intimate sound beautifully captures Bacewicz's rich textures, though I occasionally wanted more vehemence – even roughness – to intensify the dramatic impact. But

this recording should win admirers for both this fine composer and these thoughtful musicians.
Natasha Loges ★★★★

Martinů

String Quartets 2-3-5-7
Pavel Haas Quartet
Supraphon SU4368-2 78:54 mins

Placing the Fifth Quartet at the beginning of this record is a wake-up call. Starting with motoric rhythmic energy, before turning to a more lyrical second theme, it shows two faces of Martinů's composing personality. Both are beautifully and intensely conveyed here, with bright, honest sound which brings clarity to the layers of the second movement, its long sustained melody coloured by tremolo and pizzicato. Energy is unrelenting in the *Allegro vivo*, then a long slow introduction leads to an *Allegro* finale, which begins genially, but ends in darker minor hues.

The Third Quartet is more dissonant and more concentrated, coming in at 13 minutes. Hints of warmth in the *Andante* are offset by often acerbic harmonies, and the outer movements have passages of barely contained violence. What a contrast to the Seventh Quartet, whose clean lines and contrapuntal textures look back to the Baroque, although there are harmonic features and a sometimes-impish sense of humour which place it firmly in the 20th century, as well as traces of Dvořákian melody: the players manage the rapid changes of mood and colour with élan.

Echoes of Martinů's teacher Josef Suk permeate the introduction to the first movement of the Second Quartet, before it moves to a more neoclassical language, reflecting a later teacher: Roussel. There's toughness as well as sentiment in the *Andante*, and the vigorous finale contains a cadenza which, for me, interrupts the flow of the music. But a fascinating collection, well worth investigating.
Martin Cotton ★★★★★

Masterclass in Martinů: the Pavel Haas Quartet deliver the composer's works with conviction

Mendelssohn

String Quartets (X-Files)
Uxía Martínez Botana (double bass), Sergey Ostrovsky (violin), Alexander Kagan (violin), Noémie Bialobroda (viola)
Fuga Libera FUG847 47:38 mins

This is very much Uxía Martínez Botana's project, replacing cello in the quartet with double bass. What's the point? You may well ask, and the opening track – the *Adagio non troppo* from the E flat Quartet – doesn't give much of a clue. The bass plays the cello part mostly at the original pitch, and the only differences are in tone colour, which is sometimes gruffer, and phrasing, where legato can be less smooth. There's also a sense of safety in the performance, with Mendelssohn's many dynamic indications not fully explored and a rather strait-laced approach to rubato.

The high, scurrying semiquavers in the *allegro fugato* section of the *Capriccio* from the Op. 81 Pieces are often put down an octave, but not always clear in pitch, muddling the harmonic stability. And in the *Fuga*, changing octaves in the middle of phrases sometimes disturbs their shape and continuity.

Mendelssohn's response to the death of his sister, the F minor Quartet, sets off with the right feeling of despair and anger, but loses energy when it slows for the few bars of *tarantella*, and the bass tremolandi tend to come over as a rumble. Anger continues in the second movement, and this is more successful in terms of balance and coherence of texture, as is the *Adagio*, where the sustained nature of the music allows the bass sonority to match the other players better. But caution in tempo and dynamic projection rob the final *Allegro molto* of its impact. On the whole, an unsuccessful experiment.
Martin Cotton ★★

Birds of Paradise

Works by Henriette Renié, Reena Esmail and Angélica Negrón
Ember
Azica Records ACD-71383 47:18 mins

BIRDS OF PARADISE

This brisk, contemporary take on the trio by the harpist, composer, pedagogue and prodigy Henriette Renié brings an enjoyable sense of definition to the piece, making it a welcome addition to the catalogue. Renié's remarkable self-determination was both musical and ideological; she extended the role of the harp both technically and in terms of repertoire and was an activist long before the term was invented, advancing the cause of women in music and upending the convention that the harp should be a domestic pastime for women, but a profession for men. Written in 1901, her Trio's four movements draw on the style of late 19th century French Romanticism with elements of the modernist ideas that were also developing, conveyed here in an interpretation that is evocative but never mannered. Renié herself was inspired by beauty above all else, but without the preclusion of subtle intensity (as in the melancholy *Andante*) or sheer energy (as in the animated closing *Allegro*). There's a nice element of legacy here, too, in that harpist Emily Levin studied under Susann McDonald who had been a pupil of Renié.

The two shorter pieces present an expertly programmed transition into later styles. The composers have a certain amount in common: both have diverse cultural roots and both are outward-looking and polygeneric in their approaches, with Negrón's discreet use of field recordings being particularly effective. *Roger Thomas* ★★★★★

Farasha

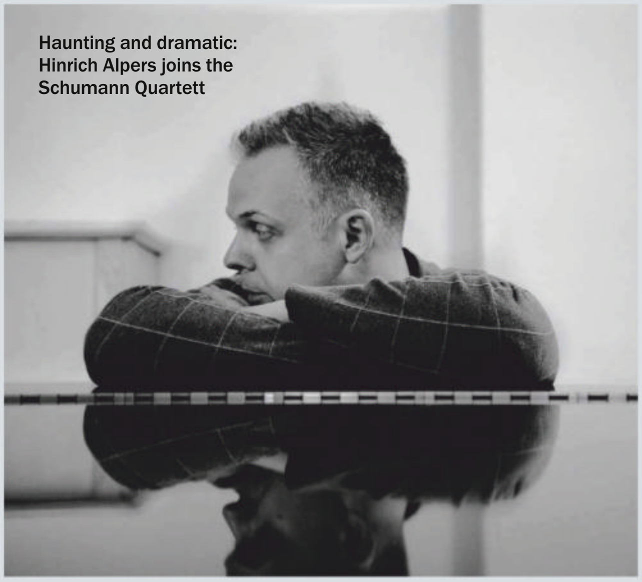
Works by de Bréville, Hindemith, Mendelssohn, Khaled Al Kammar et al
Sindy Mohamed (viola), Julien Quentin (piano), Serdar Saydan (Riq), Wassim Mukdad (Oud)
Berlin Classics 0303729BC 55:82 mins

'Farasha' is the Arabic word for 'butterfly', and Sindy Mohamed has chosen the word to reflect her complicated musical progress from dowdy larva to airborne gorgeousness. She's one of those lucky musicians with bi-cultural roots, born and brought up in France but was introduced to Arabic music by the singing of her mother. 'Everything I heard at home was Arabic,' she says. Egypt was the Hollywood of the Middle East, and Sindy absorbed all its songs.

At seven, she expressed a desire to go to a music school, and as the piano class was full, the teacher suggested that she try the viola, that being, as the teacher put it, 'an instrument that has a golden age awaiting it.' Sindy took it up seriously later, at a classical conservatoire.

The grandest work on this CD – Saint-Saëns's Sonata for Bassoon and Piano – originally reflected that composer's desire, at the end of his hugely productive life, to do justice to under-appreciated instruments. 'I am spending my last energies,' as he put it, 'on widening the repertoire.' And in this new arrangement by Léa Hennino, the viola replaces

BRIEF NOTES



Haunting and dramatic: Hinrich Alpers joins the Schumann Quartett

FELIX BROEDE

Martin • Ullmann • Fauré – *Piano Quintets etc*

Schumann Quartett, Hinrich Alpers (piano)

Berlin Classics 0303971BC

Martin
Ullmann
Fauré

Romantic, intensely dramatic and with the occasional Ravel-like feel, Martin's 1919 Piano Quintet 'À ma femme' is one of those works whose comparative neglect today seems hard to understand. Ditto the haunting Third Quartet by Ullmann, written while the doomed Austrian composer was interred in the Theresienstadt concentration camp during World War II. Altogether more familiar, Fauré's sumptuous D minor Piano Quintet of 1906 rounds off a highly recommendable listen. *Jeremy Pound* ★★★★★

Ban: *Stories of Censorship*

Apollo Chamber Players *Azica Records ACD-71385*

Ban is a striking work that explores the threat of censorship through works by an array of contemporary composers across the globe. In the opener, *The Book Of Names*, Marty Regan draws inspiration from the list compiled in 2022 of every person incarcerated in Japanese-American internment camps during WWII, with actor George Takei shining as narrator. Allison Loggins-Hull's *Ban*, Mark Buller's String Quartet No. 6, Homayoun Sakhi's *Arman (Hope)* and DJ Spooky's *Quantopia* are amongst the compelling works throughout the programme that explore historical erasure, book bans, disinformation and artistic survival through a brilliant range of electronics, spoken word and varied instrumental arrangements. *Miranda Bardsley* ★★★★★

Voyager – *Works by Beethoven, Debussy et al*

Viano Quartet *Platoon PLAT2738*

The 2019 Banff Competition winners here pay homage to NASA's 1977 Voyager programme. Taking centre stage is Beethoven's Op. 130, including the 'Cavatina', featured on Voyager's Golden Record, and played with beautifully controlled emotion. Alistair Coleman's *Moonshot* captures well a sense of mystery, while Hao Zhou's arrangements, including 'Clair de Lune' are warm and understated. *Charlotte Smith* ★★★★

the bassoon to create a strikingly different and very beautiful sound-world, enriched by the delicate addition of the riq tambourine and the oud.

The oud appears again here in a short piece by Khaled Al Kammar, which lets Mohamed's expressive technique shine, as does everything else on this CD, which is full of surprises. De Bréville's forgotten work is a very welcome exhumation, as is Hindemith's short sonata, while a brief viola arrangement of Mendelssohn's most popular song-without-words adds a dash of perfumed high spirits.
Michael Church ★★★★

Gypsy Melodies

Works by Bartók, Boulanger, Dvořák, Janáček et al

Talich Quartet

La Dolce Volta LDV129 59:57 mins

GYPSY MELODIES
TALICH QUARTET

The rationale for this winning collection of arrangements for string quartet of songs, duets and instrumental items seems to be that musical hits don't belong exclusively to the modern popular repertoire. A classical 'hit' in any era, and certainly in the 19th century, could bring a work into the home in reworkings for other mediums, although not so frequently for a professional string quartet.

Nevertheless, there is an excellent precedent for the Talich Quartet's treatment of Dvořák's *Gypsy Songs* from the composer himself. Dvořák made very successful versions of 12 of his early Cypress song settings, although quite what he would have thought of the rather sentimental embellishments added to the main theme of 'Songs My Mother Taught Me' on its second appearance can only be guessed at.

But across the board these arrangements, the majority by Jiří Kabát, are invariably idiomatic and very enjoyable on their own terms. Janáček's *Moravian Folk Poetry in Songs*, a pungent mix of lively swagger and heartfelt emotion, reveal new dimensions when transferred to this format. Bartók's *Romanian Folk Dances*, with the quartet enhanced by a double bass and some splendid cimbalom playing from Ľubomír Gašpar, benefit greatly from some varied, not to say, uninhibited treatment.

The players of the Talich Quartet clearly revel in this repertoire and are equally at home in the soulful numbers as in the sheer fun of the more excitable items such as Georges Boulanger's *Sérénade Tzigane* and Ivan Vasiliev's well-known *Deux Guitares*. Sustained listening 'hit by hit' might prove a touch on the enervating side, but dipping in here and there to these infectiously played miniatures is a guilty pleasure well worth savouring. *Jan Smaczny* ★★★★★

Passing Fancy: *Beauty in a Moment of Chaos*

Works by Byrd, Dering, Duarte, Rossi et al

Sonnambula/Elizabeth Weinfield; James Kennerley (harpsichord and tenor)

Avie AV2746 53:35 mins

This is a beautiful disc with a slightly odd agenda. Sonnambula is an American ensemble of viols, violins and keyboard, now resident at the Frick Collection in New York, and they weave together very effectively contrasted groups of pieces: viol fantasias by the Elizabethan Richard Dering; dances, sonatas and a song by Salamone Rossi; sinfonias by Leonora Duarte and keyboard music by William Byrd. They start with a reduction of a feisty overture by Élisabeth Jacquet de la Guerre, and there are two vocal items: a psalm setting by Rossi and finally a 15th-century song from the famous Spanish Cancionero de Palacio ('Mi querer tanto vos quiere').

All are beautifully turned, and the wide chronological range is hardly a concern: the Dering comes across as slightly severe, the Rossi is more lively, while the sinfonias by Leonora Duarte are dramatic and compelling. A few extrovert moments come in the Byrd keyboard pieces, nicely played on a sweet-toned harpsichord by James Kennerley; he also adds the vocal lines in the two songs.

I would find this cool and expert sequence very satisfying as it stands. But the background we are invited to grasp from the title and elsewhere is that some of these composers, like Byrd and Dering, had to hide their religious identity; some like Duarte had to live as Christians, though they were Jewish. The chosen pieces

Tuned to perfection: the Talich Quartet impress in Bartók, Dvořák and beyond

do not seem to specially highlight this valid point (as might some of Byrd's motet texts, for instance). Director Elizabeth Weinfield, who contributes scholarly notes, says that the purpose of the record is 'to play with the notion of intimate, personal beauty existing on the edge of destruction, misinterpretation and outing'. Make of that what you will, but enjoy the disc anyway.
Nicholas Kenyon ★★★

The Violin Waltzes

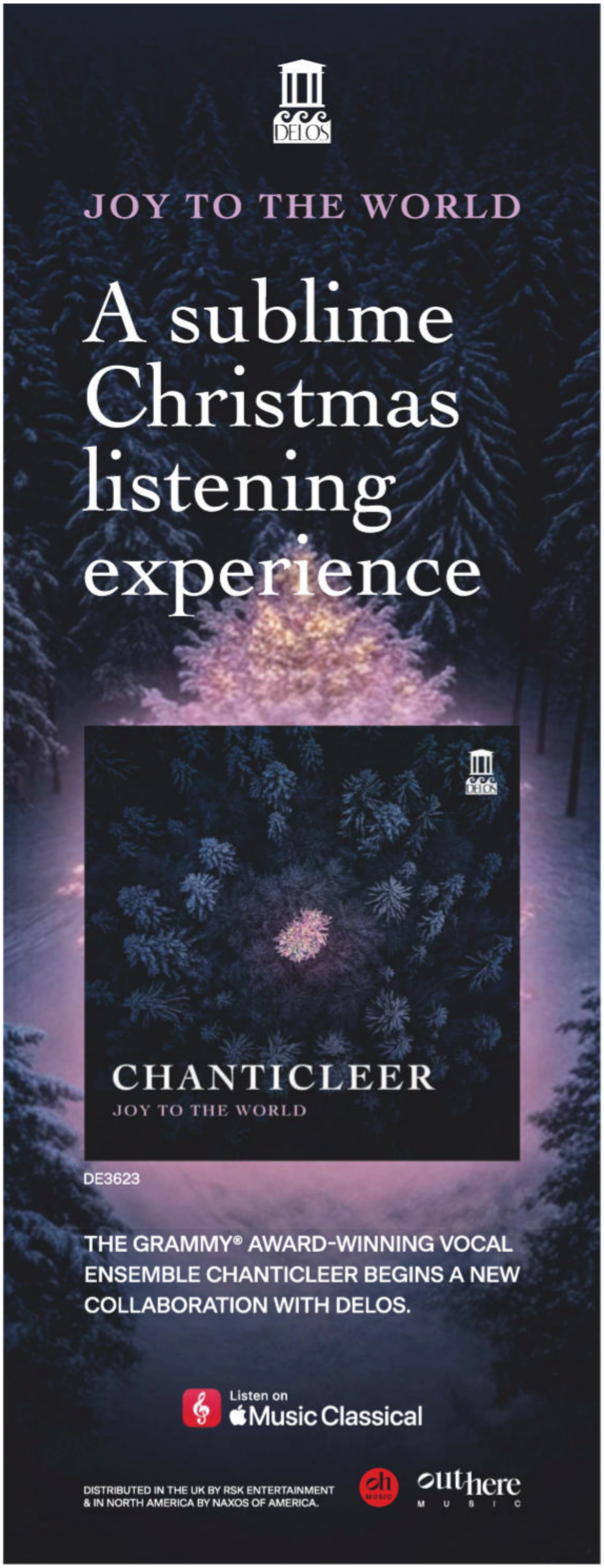
Works by Beethoven, Chopin, Delibes and Schubert
Maya Magub (violin), Matthew Schellhorn (piano)
CRD CRD3560 19:30 mins

Emma and Tom Pauncefort continue to reinvigorate the CRD label founded by their late father Graham over 50 years ago, with new issues like this enticing collection from violinist Maya Magub, who also arranged the pieces included here, and her pianist Matthew Schellhorn.

There's nothing especially novel about waltz transcriptions for violin and piano. For example, the great Czech virtuoso Váša Příhoda (1900-1960) concocted a stunning bravura potpourri on the show-stopping waltzes from Strauss's *Der Rosenkavalier*, and there have been countless other examples, too, though hitherto, you'd have struggled to find an entire recital disc devoted only to this genre.

This release delights the ear and enchants the imagination. But it's not just the tonal beauty and dexterity of Maya Magub's playing, nor yet Matthew Schellhorn's immaculate pianism which alone carry the day here. Just as intriguing and always meticulously fashioned are Magub's bewitching arrangements, which afford novel perspectives on waltzes which are at once familiar, and yet, in their cleverly crafted new guises, will surprise and often enrapture.

While the Chopin and Delibes works would seem obvious candidates for remodelling, the waltzes attributed to Beethoven, originally written for piano, might appear to offer less potential for overhaul, but Maya Magub finds something unexplored in each of them. Equally appealing are her nimbly idiomatic Schubert transcriptions, again all familiar fare in their regular versions, but afforded unexpected depth and expressive impact when reimagined for violin and piano. In sum, a superbly played and atmospherically recorded offering – highly recommended.
Michael Jameson ★★★★★



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Instrumental

INSTRUMENTAL CHOICE

TAMAR SAGIV
SHADES OF MOURNING

A personal and deeply felt expression of sorrow

Roger Thomas **is impressed by the elegant skill and emotional conviction of this accomplished debut**

Timeless creativity: Tamar Sagiv showcases her improvisational skills

APAR PARAKHOL, HANNAN IMAGES

Shades Of Mourning

Original cello works

Tamar Sagiv

Sono Luminus SLE-70041 33:39 mins

Given that all compositions are arguably revised improvisations and that improvisations can be thought of as unrevised compositions, performed at the moment of their creation, there's some particularly interesting territory existing between these two concepts. Tamar Sagiv has made this her own with the improvisation-derived solo works on this recording, the theme of which is signalled by its title. In discussing this release, her debut as a composer/performer, she refers both to personal grief at the loss of a close family member and to conflict in the wider world, both of which she addresses.

Stylistically, her solo music is melodic and oddly timeless, and indeed placeless, somehow evoking both Bach and Dave Holland. An allusion to the music of her own culture is inevitable but facile given her focus on transcultural elements such as the keening vocalese she adds to her deeply dug and occasionally knowingly and deliberately under-refined instrumental lines.

Literally central to this release, however, is a set of elegant string trios that are as meticulous as their solo counterparts are spontaneous, not that either approach in any way loses out to the other. There's a discernible American influence to these pieces that brings to mind the quartets of Ives, Carter and Ruth Crawford Seeger, with Sagiv herself citing the use of elements derived from the work of Philip Glass.

Like the solo compositions that bookend this section, the pieces themselves are highly programmatic and undeniably heart-on-sleeve but avoid sentimental entrapment through their sheer conviction and resolute emotive force.

★★★★★

> This debut release refers both to personal grief and to conflict in the wider world

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JS Bach

Cello Suites

Anastasia Kobekina (cello)

Sony Classical G010005564113K 144:28 mins

In her booklet notes, Anastasia Kobekina writes that 'there are as many versions of Bach Suites as there are stars in the sky'. The inevitable question then arises: what she can add to the existing legacy? Cast in a free period performance style, employing two Stradivari for the first five Suites and a piccolo cello for the Sixth Suite, Kobekina's articulation is light and elegant. This approach is persuasive in the more vigorous dance movements, such as the gigues, bourrées and menuets. But at the same time, she generates a beautiful melodic line within the chords of the Sixth Suite Sarabande.

Unfortunately, there are also some miscalculations. The first issue to address is the five existing sources for the work. If you are basing your performance on the Anna Magdalena manuscript, as seems to be the case here, you have to realise that the text has some significant mistakes that are largely ironed out in modern urtext editions. But in the Prelude to the Fourth Suite, Kobekina elects to thunder in on a low C at bar 82 rather than the home key of E flat. This sounds wrong and could prove irritating on repeated listening.

My main area of contention, however, is Kobekina's wilful use of rubato. There needs to be a pulse going through the preludes, but it doesn't have to be fixed. The skill is to point the harmonies, but not add exclamation marks to the reading, or it becomes fussy. This problem surfaces especially in the Fifth Suite where the Sarabande all but grinds to halt – an expressive gesture that is overdone. *Jo Talbot* ★★★

Castelnuovo-Tedesco

Platero; Angelus; Return etc

Niklas Johansen (guitar)

Our Recordings 8.226930-31 109:06 mins (2CD)

PLATERO Y YO

It is not an exaggeration to describe this double album, performed by the Danish guitarist Niklas Johansen, as a piece of poetry. Each of the 28 pieces illustrate the work of the Spanish poet Juan Ramon Jiménez. His collection of prose poems *Platero y Yo* tells the story of the poet and his donkey, and the Andalusian area in which he grew up. This recording, however, doesn't feature any spoken word alongside the accompanying pieces of music written by the Italian composer Mario Castelnuovo-Tedesco. They are obviously illustrative, and produce a sound world that is Southern European, with hints of flamenco, cascading arpeggios and percussive timbres conjuring up sounds of that terrain.

The exploration of the natural, rural landscape by Castelnuovo-Tedesco notates some of the sonorities that the guitar produces so well. In the opening 'Platero', for example, the apparent simplicity of folk language is featured – sometimes working from the basic tuning open strings only. Or in 'Wayside Flower' the knocking on the guitar gives the wooden, honest timbres of earth and nature.

Some of the colours work beautifully; the playfulness of 'White Butterflies' or the rain of 'April Idyll' connect the senses to the smell of petrichor, the Moorish architecture of the landscape and the sound of children playing freely.

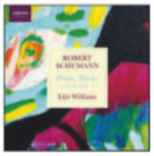
Despite the free, characterful, sensitive composition and interpretation by Johansen, the music does sometimes feel like accompaniment – rather than individual pieces that stand up in their own right – and may work best in that role. The poetry in the accompanying booklet nevertheless combines with the music to make a delightful treat for the senses.
Anne Templer ★★★

Form and fantasy: there is much to admire in Llŷr Williams's Schumann

Schumann

Piano Works (Vol. 2)

Llŷr Williams (piano)
Signum Classics SIGCD923 153:03 mins (2CD)



There's so much to admire in these remarkable recordings. Llŷr Williams has a finely developed feeling for so many features of Schumann's piano writing. The inner voices, the sense that the texture is in conversation with itself – Williams really gets that. The phrasing too is beautifully focused, with pedalling just about perfect, with only some clipped phrase-ends in the Third Sonata first movement raising doubts.

When it comes to Schumann's dream logic, the feeling that each new phase of, say, *Arabesque* enters like someone saying '...oh, and another thing...' – Williams taps into that so effortlessly that he makes you wonder why other pianists have problems with it. At the same time, the two sonatas, and especially No. 3, are compelling demonstrations of intellectual brilliance, if of a somewhat lateral kind. There is form here, not just fantasy, even if at times it sounds like the kind of thing a musical MC Escher might have devised.

Emotionally, Williams is wonderful in the dreamier music, the 'Eusebius' territory, whether melancholy or quietly ecstatic. I'm not quite so sure when it comes to Eusebius's counterpart, the impassioned, crazy, demonic Florestan – the Schumann that even Clara sometimes found unnerving. It's not a problem in the *Arabesque*, or *Blumenstück*, and the two sonatas work very well taken on Williams's terms, especially the enigmatic *Finale* of No. 1. But there are moments in *Kreisleriana* that could be, well, madder. As for that monster piece, *Études Symphoniques*, Williams's approach strikes me as too civilised. There is a mania here that needs to be acknowledged. That said, this is an enjoyable collection, with valuable fresh perspectives, and it's recorded sympathetically.
Stephen Johnson ★★★★

Letters from Paris

Works by Aznavour, Chopin, Debussy, Hahn, Satie et al

Alexandra Whittingham (guitar) et al
Decca 4871143 46:34 mins

This colourful box of sweets by Alexandra Whittingham is a guitar album of characterful, small pieces interspersed with pretty collaborations, lifting the spirits and presenting some unashamed 'light' classics. Those classics include hummable tunes such as Edith Piaf's 'La Vie en Rose' and 'She' by Charles Aznavour, though this French themed album also manages to squeeze in a few more 'serious' composers.

Unsurprisingly for the guitar, pieces by Debussy and Satie reveal a cleanliness in sound, and Whittingham manages to draw on the many colours it can produce, with fresh, expressive sonorities, though with surprisingly muscular energetic qualities when called on. Ida Presti's 'Danse Rythmique' illustrates this beautifully – presenting the damped pizzicato technique. In all of this, Wittingham has an outstanding sense of rhythm, and there is never any doubt of the musical direction of the pieces, although arguably they are all so miniature that a long linear sense isn't really called upon.

Musical direction is exemplified in Whittingham's collaboration with other artists, adding at times an extraordinary delicacy to the mix. Jess Gillam's velvety soprano saxophone sound on *Chanson Grises* No. 5, 'L'Heure exquise' by Reynaldo Hahn for example is delicious, and the joyful uplift of the Carducci String Quartet in 'Mademoiselle de Paris' by Paul Durand is a cheerful exploration of pleasure in bite-sized pieces. These combined little golden nuggets produce a listening experience that can be consumed and enjoyed by absolutely anyone.
Anne Templer ★★★★

Renaissance

Works by Byrd, Dowland, Frescobaldi et al

Shani Diluka (piano)
Warner Classics 2173251429 75:39 mins

Handel would doubtless be somewhat nonplussed to find himself on a disc purporting to fly the flag of the Renaissance – and he wouldn't be alone. Appropriating soulful Marcello, JS Bach brings up the rear; and a cluster of Scarlatti sonatas follow a Purcell group that includes Shani Diluka's own arrangement of the Lament from *Dido and Aeneas* (in which no amount of keyboard caress can quite evoke the heart-shredding cries of 'Remember me' shorn of voice).

Diluka's fascination is with the idea of the Renaissance and its legacy; but the rationale is all a bit woolly, even if 'Dido's Lament' (harrowingly) and Handel's great Chaconne in G (exuberantly) shake hands with the time-honoured imperatives of the ground bass. Wooliness is not a charge that can be laid at her thoughtful pianism, however. True a halo of decidedly generous pedalling swaddles her transcription of Palestrina's *Panis Angelicus*, but the festoons of ornaments that enrobe the likes of Byrd and Frescobaldi are nimbly negotiated; and having conjured an almost hurdy-gurdy-like undertow to support Anon's splendidly named 'My Lady Carey's Dompe', Diluka unleashes a right hand revelling in dazzlingly fleet-fingered figuration.

The Scarlatti group, heavily dominated by minor key sonatas, alights on some leisurely introspection that intriguingly sometimes seems to lean almost towards Rameau. Invigorating respite is to hand however as the C major 'La Caccia' Sonata is saddled up for a headlong gallop that takes no hostages; while, the flamenco-infiltrated D minor K141 proves flamboyantly flammable. *Paul Riley* ★★★

Small Treasures

Works by Brahms, Mozart, Poulenc, C Schumann, R Schumann
Sarah Beth Briggs (piano)
Avie AV2771 75:53 mins

Robert Schumann's *Waldszenen* is strangely neglected among the composer's piano cycles. It lacks the virtuoso element of his earlier dazzlers such as *Kreisleriana* and *Carnaval*; moreover, there is a subtle, elusive darkness lurking in the thickets of this forest. Whether in the pseudo-Baroque spookiness of the 'Verrufene Stelle' (Haunted Place), the unsettling 'Vogel als Prophet' (The Prophet Bird) or the exquisite final farewell which out-sings Mendelssohn for *Song Without Words*-ness, there is more to it than first meets the eye. Sarah Beth Briggs begins her recital of 'small treasures' with it, offering just the kind of intimate atmosphere and songful phrasing it needs, with pleasing if maybe slightly over-close recorded sound.

Offsetting Robert's work with music by Clara, Briggs brings us some of that composer's best piano pieces: her E major *Impromptu* and the *Quatre Pièces Fugitives*, works that reveal her spirited and sophisticated personal voice. Even rarer in the concert hall these days, however, are the French gems that follow: Poulenc's *Trois Novelettes* and Tailleferre's *Sicilienne*, played here with clarity and warmth.

Although Briggs can occasionally sound over-deliberate, she has a special secret weapon at her disposal, and it is arguably clearest in the Robert Schumann *Arabeske* and Brahms's Op. 119 *Klavierstücke*: she is excellently alive to the presence of music in silence. She allows as much meaning to lurk between the notes as in the sound itself. Not all pianists do. *Jessica Duchen* ★★★★

BRIEF NOTES

Ellis Island **Works by Bartók, Mingus, György Kurtág and Meredith Monk** Julia Hamos (piano) *Naïve V8674 50:69 mins*

This personal tribute to a pianist's family history encompasses a Hungarian origin story and a new home in New York. The shifts from unsettling Kurtág to the comforting, tonal minimalism of Monk and Mingus effectively illustrate a profound journey – but it's in the Bartók that Hamos really flies, her securely cushioned technique couching their springy, jagged rhythms with ease. *Charlotte Smith* ★★★

Femmes de Légende **Works by Chaminade, Farrenc, C Schumann et al** Nareh Arghamanyan (piano) *Hanssler HC25026 68:52 mins*

This is a beautifully curated album that brings to life the work of 14 visionary female composers between the 18th and 20th centuries. While celebrated figures such as Clara Schumann and Lili Boulanger appear, lesser-known but equally remarkable composers like Johanna Senfter and Else Schmitz-Gohr are also highlighted. The record showcases not only Arghamanyan's expressive, sensitive artistry, but also the thoughtful research that inspired the repertoire. An important record that sheds a light on women whose music deserves far more recognition. *Miranda Bardsley* ★★★★★

Melancholia **Rick Wakeman** *Madfish Music SMACD1330 43:47 mins*

Wakeman fans hoping for the sparkling finger work that famously graced songs by Yes, Bowie, Cat Stevens et al in the 1970s and '80s may find themselves a little disappointed here, as the prog rock legend is on restrained, reflective form in this album of short piano pieces. Don't be put off by the downbeat title, however, as it's by no means all doom and gloom but, instead, is largely a series of amiable, if undemanding, ambles around the keyboard. *Jeremy Pound* ★★★

The Eule Organ of Magdalen College, Oxford

Works by Grainger, Karg-Elert, Liszt, Smyth, Warlock et al
Alexander Pott (organ)
Convivium CR109 88:16 mins (2CD)

Under the heading of 'Anglo-Saxony', the organist Alexander Pott's programme note makes many intriguing connections borne out by his performances of composers – mostly German and English – drawn to Leipzig and Dresden. Also included are a few composers influenced by them, but underlying all these connections is the organ of Magdalen College itself: built by the firm of Hermann Eule, established in the German town of Bautzen in 1872, Oxford's new organ was installed 150 years later and is worth celebrating on this recording.

Liszt's 'Funérailles' (transcribed by Jeanne Demessieux) makes a fitting start, its glowering textures showcasing an organ whose colours are further revealed in Pott's virtuosic performance of the Liszt arrangement of the 'Pilgrim's Chorus' from *Tannhäuser*. Central to the assortment of other composers here, Carl Reinecke often gets a bad rap, not least from his one-time student Ethel Smyth, whose own Prelude and Fugue on *O Traurigkeit, O Herzeleid* hardly sets the pulses racing; Reinecke's Sonata in G minor Op. 284 emerges more warmly, especially in its magnificent finale based on the Epiphany chorale *Wie schön leuchtet der Morgenstern*. A lovely miniature from Sigfrid Karg-Elert belies his rather heavy reputation and spotlights a rare stop, the Physharmonica.

Another Reinecke student in Leipzig, Frederick Delius is the programme's secondary axis, drawing together Percy Grainger, Percy Whitlock, Peter Warlock (in Pott's effective arrangements of his five *Folk-Song Preludes*) and Frederic Austin. Baritone turned composer, Austin is especially welcome since his rhapsodic Organ Sonata in G receives its premiere recording here. *John Allison* ★★★★

Travels with Cello

Works by Mendelssohn, Piazzolla, Tsintsadze et al
Susanna Mendlow (cello)
Acis Productions APL17749 60:36 mins

Susanna Mendlow is the archetypal cellist of today, straddling pluralistic styles and genres, alongside promoting educational projects. Here she dons the arranger's hat as well in this enterprising selection of repertoire. Her transformation to B flat of the Mendelssohn F Major Violin Sonata is a hit. This work has abundant melodious impact and sits well in the cello's register. Unfortunately, Michael Angelucci's piano tone is rather brittle, and more dynamic and timbral variety from both players would also help the impact of the fresh and delightful opening *Allegro*. The *Adagio* is full of poignant long melodies but also begs for more sophisticated colouring in the nuance. On the other hand, there is plenty of bravura playing in the virtuosic *Presto*, though some of the passage work gets a little scrambled, and repeated figurations would benefit from more subtle shading.

On the dance floor, Piazzolla's tango, *Milonga sin palabras* has much brooding intensity, but not enough tonal variety. Sulkhan Tsintsadze's *Five Pieces for Cello and Piano* also offer some dance movements, notably 'Plyasovaya' which positively pulsates with energy, although there are occasional strained moments in the double stops. The left- hand pizzicatos in 'Chonguri' are difficult to project, but Mendlow does a good job in this solo movement. A similar energy impacts on the *Daichovo horo* – a highly successful arrangement of the traditional fast folk dance from northern Bulgaria, its passionate and fiery melodies vividly depicted.

Two short solo pieces from Noam Faingold and Julia Adolphe provide a striking contrast and are persuasively performed, the Faingold offering a grittier acerbic musical language than the rest of the programme. *Jo Talbot* ★★★

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Teleology

Peggy Seeger
Red Grape Music RGPSCD5

A true grande dame of Anglo-American folk music, and a veteran of seven decades as a singer, songwriter, feminist and political activist, the amazing Peggy Seeger released her 25th and final solo album *Teleology* just a month before her 90th birthday. During a recent interview with Jools Holland on his *Later...* TV show, Seeger attributed her phenomenal artistic longevity to the love of her family and, fittingly, her twin sons Neill and Calum plus daughter-in-law Kate St John can be heard on *Teleology*. The record is actually the third album in the closing hat-trick of discs that have concluded her recording career; this began with *Everything Changes* (2013), continued in style with *First Farewell*, which appeared in this column for November 2021.

This recent and most likely final farewell features nine new songs, such as the rousing opener 'Sing About These Hard Times'. There are also two reworked older songs, including a dignified reclamation of 'The First Time Ever I Saw Your Face', written in Seeger's honour by her lover Ewan MacColl, and made into a global hit by the late, great singer Roberta Flack. And then, 'Sit Down' jauntily combines humour and politics with the inimitable line: 'When the NHS is up for sale... And the government's spouting fairytales,' after which 'Driftwood' honours refugees everywhere and 'No Place Like Home' addresses the homelessness pandemic. Happy birthday, Ms Seeger, and many happy returns! ★★★★★

December round-up

Although he's been writing and performing for many years, **Donald WG Lindsay** might come across as a bold new Scottish talent on ***Two Boats Under the Moon***, his excellent two-disc debut – the first of eloquent originals, and the other of traditional, arranged material, both in agreeable and leisurely tempos. Lindsay sings and plays small pipes and baritone guitar while Roo Geddes offers marvellous accompaniment on the violin and piano, which have the warmth of a pair of arms fondly embracing the singer's brae bonnie brogue. Romance? Aye... by the boatload! *(Donald WG Lindsay DL001)* ★★★★★

Radium Girls by **Phew, Erika Kobayashi** and **Dieter Moebius** is a unique Japanese/German fusion album of treated vocals, spoken word and electronica that took root in response to the Fukushima nuclear power station disaster of 2011. The record has been reissued and released on CD (and vinyl) in the year that has seen the 80th anniversary/commemoration of the victims of the USA's use of atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki to end the Second World War. We hear the deadpan voice of Tokyo-based novelist, comic and visual artist Erika Kobayashi, who elides engagingly between English and Japanese over often unsettling electronic effects by Dieter Moebius – one of Germany's leading protagonists of avant-garde electronica who passed away in 2015. Moebius's work is complemented by that of Phew, a pioneer of Japan's underground music scene. The title is dedicated to US female factory workers who suffered radiation poisoning due to their work painting watch dials with radioactive luminous paint. Not a feel-good record, at all. *(Tapete Records/Bureau B BB485-CD)* ★★★★★

Radium Girls

Al-Hambra is a warmly swinging instrumental dialogue inspired by a visit to the Alhambra palace in Granada, Spain. This vibrant recording pairs Iraqi oudist **Ahmed Mukhtar** with Argentinian/Italian guitarist **Ignacio Lusardi Monteverde** to trace the influence of Middle Eastern oud on flamenco guitar. Exploring shared structures such as maqam and flamenco scales, they are joined by percussionist Demi Garcia Sabat. This record is a culmination of an artistic partnership that began in London in 2017, after which they toured in Bahrain, India and Iraq. *(ARC Music EUCD2972)* ★★★★★

There's more oud from Tunisian maestro **Anouar Brahem** on ***After the Last Sky***, in which he leads an adventurous quartet with cellist Anja Lechner alongside Django Bates (piano) and Dave Holland on double bass. It's a remarkably inclusive work that merges the Arabic maqams that are essential to Brahem's musical identity with modal harmonic approaches of jazz and influences of European classical music. *(ECM ECM 2838)* ★★★★★

Guitari Baro is a trio of virtuoso Guinean and Malian Mande griots, whose name means 'guitar conversations'. These take place between Gaoussou Kouyate and Kerfala Diabate on acoustic and electric guitars alongside the tonkling, woody tones of the balafon (West African xylophone with a 1000-year heritage) of Lassana Diabaté, while referencing Congolese rumba, rock and roll, Cuban music and Guinean dance bands. They first met in Dakar in November 2024 and are here produced by Mande music authority Lucy Durán, Dudu Sarr and Pape Armand Boye. *(Chrysalis Global CRC2220)* ★★★★★

GUITARI BARO

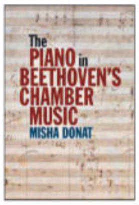
Books

Our critics cast their eyes over the latest selection of books on all things music

The Piano in Beethoven's Chamber Music

Misha Donat

Boydell 978-1-837-65219-8 480pp (pb) £39.95



As the late Alfred Brendel noted in his appreciative foreword, this comprehensive new monograph 'ploughs a neglected field'. Misha Donat's scholarly yet engaging survey of an oft-unheeded facet of Beethoven's output amply fills a void in the literature.

While Beethoven's symphonies, concertos, string quartets and piano sonatas have all received wide-ranging musicological and historical analysis in print, tantalisingly little has appeared previously which could effectively redress the balances where Beethoven's chamber works with piano are concerned, and that's where this offering scores decisively.

Graced by 254 musical examples, all lucidly described and judiciously chosen, this book will accompany the curious listener through what might at first seem a rather specialised group of works. Donat's authoritative, elegantly written text affords a chronological overview of some 30 compositions, including Beethoven's piano trios, sonatas for violin and cello, piano quartets, the Quintet for Piano and Winds, Op. 16, and even such rarities as his two pieces for mandolin and piano. 'With Misha Donat,' Brendel added, 'I found myself in the safest hands.' Little more need be said, and this superb publication is emphatically recommended!

Michael Jameson ★★★★★

Lin-Manuel Miranda – The Education of an Artist

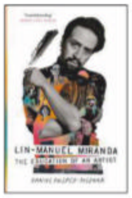
Daniel Pollack-Pelzner

Atlantic Books 978-1-805-46522-5 400pp (hb) £20

Two's company: Lin-Manuel Miranda views his Madame Tussauds wax figure in New York, 2025

GETTY

'I knew the output; I was curious to figure out the input,' writes Daniel Pollack-Pelzner of Lin-Manuel Miranda. An incomparable voice in musical theatre and the Obama era, Miranda has accepted that the first line of his obituary will be the success of *Hamilton*, a show which this year marks a decade of life, five years on streaming (having practically launched the Disney Plus app) and an indelible mark made on theatre. Miranda has dedicated his career since to 'things [he'll] learn from'.



Drawing on 150 people close to the composer – and with a dozen interviews with the man himself – Pollack-Pelzner presents a vibrant portrait of Miranda and the influences and creatives that have shaped him. Just 28 years old when he won his first raft of Tony Awards for his hip-hop and salsa-infused *In the Heights*, it's easy to assume Miranda was successful from the off – but this book busts the 'genius myth', lifting the lid on the process of rewrites, mistakes and cuts that have made him the preeminent musical theatre voice of a generation, all the while managing to avoid sycophancy.

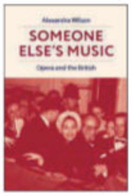
Freya Parr ★★★★★

Someone Else's Music – Opera and the British

Alexandra Wilson

OUP 978-0-197-80363-9 296pp (hb) £22.99

Alexandra Wilson's story begins happily enough, with the British across most class and cultural divides enjoying a night at the opera. Then, in the 1970s opera became elitist, distrusted by politicians for bypassing popular culture, despised by the chattering classes for ignoring issues of class, race and gender, and punished by public funders for pandering to the few not the many. It was William Rees-Mogg, then Chair of the Arts Council, who declared 'subsidy creates dependence'.



Someone Else's Music is more nuanced than this summary suggests as it strives to account for the diminished place in which opera finds itself in the UK now. If changes in cultural expectations are to blame, the media, writes Wilson, are also responsible for parroting stereotypes about opera being all tiaras and tuxedos for elites when the evidence tells another story.

Wilson marshals this evidence with telling skill, and the depth and width of her research commands respect. As for the future, her answer appears to be that we remember the Reithian injunction: to inform, educate and, above all, entertain.

Christopher Cook ★★★★

The Photography of Herman Leonard

Edited by David Houston, Jenny Bagert & Foreword by Quincy Jones

Scala 978-1-785-51604-7 (hb) £50

'Since his youth, Leonard has been interested in anthropology and the diverse people of the world,' writes David Houston in the introduction to this beautifully presented and carefully considered anthology of the photographer's work. This far-reaching collection captures the extraordinary breadth of Leonard's career – from early street photography in cities like New York and Paris, to quiet and pensive wartime images and rare portraits of iconic figures like Einstein, Marilyn Monroe and Paul Newman, to his career-defining, smoky jazz shots of Miles Davis, Chet Baker, Dizzy Gillespie and Louis Armstrong. Indeed, as the inimitable Quincy Jones notes in his insightful foreword, 'When people think of jazz, their mental picture is likely one of Herman's.' This book's real triumph, though, lies in its balance between the familiar and the unexpected, revealing Leonard as an artist of remarkable range, curiosity and empathy. Visually? It is, of course, stunning. The images are full of life and history, weaving together a narrative throughout the book which allows us to examine Leanord's own artistic evolution. This is a truly magical collection, for jazz lovers, photography enthusiasts and everyone in between.

THE PHOTOGRAPHY OF HERMAN LEONARD

Miranda Bardsley ★★★★★

From the archives

Andrew McGregor looks over this month's reissued and live archive recordings

ARCHIVE CHOICE

Remembering an icon

A stirring celebration of Handel and the luminous artistry of Lorraine Hunt Lieberson

A timeless voice: Handel's arias shine in Lorraine Hunt Lieberson's 2003 collection

LORRAINE
HUNT
LIEBERSON

Lorraine Hunt Lieberson

Handel Arias (Remaster 2025)

Lorraine Hunt Lieberson (mezzo-soprano); Orchestra of the Age of Enlightenment/ Harry Bicket et al

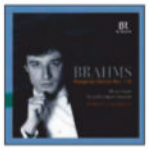
Avie AV2792 67:01 mins

If you knew nothing about the background to this 2003 recording it would still be one of the most poignant albums of Handel arias, for the intensity of engagement and communicative power of American mezzo Lorraine Hunt Lieberson. Handel's oratorio *Theodora* was one of her calling cards, and here she sings the arias of Theodora's friend Irene. 'As with rosy steps the morn' encompasses the beauty of a sunrise, the resilience of their faith and an underlying sense of vulnerability. Her final aria 'New scenes of joy' is almost unbearably undercut by the plangent voice and Handel's melancholy C minor. In the cantata *La Lucrezia*, Hunt Lieberson brings soul-shaking outrage and heart-breaking grief, while 'Ombra mai fu' from Handel's *Serse* offers inner radiance, simplicity and serenity, everything lifted by the expressive subtlety of the Orchestra of the Age of Enlightenment and Harry Bicket's sensitive conducting. He knew that his soloist was living with terminal cancer and trimmed the recording sessions to save her energy. Truly great Handel, and we're blessed to be able to remember Lorraine like this. ★★★★★

December round-up

Out of a swirling crackle of surface noise emerges Beethoven's G major Romance, and the sweet, powerful sound of Australian-born violinist ***Daisy Kennedy*** in 1919, described by the New York Times as 'a player of great vigour, domination and decisiveness'. Daisy Kennedy's recordings for British Columbia and Duophone include Schumann and Grieg sonatas, and a range of encores with her UK champion Hamilton Harty. If only there were concertos, but Kennedy's personality emerges strongly in the performances and some lively reminiscences in interview. Kennedy retired in 1937 but died as recently as 1981 in London. Fascinating re-discoveries. *(Biddulph 85063-2)* ★★★

As Daisy Kennedy left the concert hall, ***Yehudi Menuhin*** was beginning his recording career. In 1936, he was 19 when, with his sister Hephzibah, he recorded his mentor Enescu's Third Violin Sonata, and it's a delight to hear them exploring the gypsy fiddle sounds together in remarkably good sound. Robert Schumann's Violin Concerto was rediscovered in 1937; Menuhin hoped to give the premiere but had to settle for the first uncut recording in 1938 with Barbirolli in New York – rugged, passionate playing. Vieuxtemps's Concerto No. 4 with Süsskind and the Philharmonia in 1951 has impressive breadth and sweetness. *(Parnassus PACL 95017)* ★★★★



Brahms's ***21 Hungarian Dances*** are all about 19th century enthusiasm for gypsy romanticism, inspired by the melodies, folk rhythms and harmonies Brahms absorbed from Hungarian violinist Eduard Reményi. Popular orchestral favourites ever since, and ***Roberto Abbado*** made these recordings in the mid-'90s towards the end of his time as the Munich Radio Orchestra's chief conductor. There's a richness to the playing and they revel in the rustic charm, the melodic breadth only just shy of the inner detail and immediacy of the finest performances. Hugely enjoyable, nonetheless. *(BR Klassik 900360)* ★★★★

Daniil Shafran was the other great Soviet cellist, overshadowed by the personality and international visibility of Rostropovich. But for many cello aficionados, Shafran is differently compelling, with an athleticism to his playing that is captivating. ***Daniil Shafran: More Cello Masterworks*** begins with Tchaikovsky's *Rococo Variations* with Kondrashin in 1949, a showcase for Shafran's spontaneity, fluidity and virtuosity. In Prokofiev's Symphony-Concerto with Rozhdestvensky in 1961, Shafran's focused sound is exhilarating, and Saint-Saëns's *Swan* with Emil Gilels... Pure poetry. *(Parnassus PACL95016)* ★★★★

One of the great modern recordings of Puccini's ***Tosca*** disappeared a few years ago (for 'contractual reasons') and missed the composer's anniversary in 2024. ***Antonio Pappano*** revels in the theatricality and passion of Puccini's score with the forces of the Royal Opera House. Angela Gheorghiu spits fire in the title role, Roberto Alagna's Cavaradossi is her ardent foil, and as a ruthless Scarpia, Ruggero Raimondi husbands his resources, creating with Gheorghiu a terrifying climax to the second act. A cinematic recording, as lurid as the performance and a welcome return. *(Warner Classics 2173278585)* ★★★★

Andrew McGregor is the presenter of Radio 3's *Record Review*, broadcast each Saturday afternoon from 2pm-4pm

Gold standard: Brigitte Engerer's Harmonia Mundi collection is a treat

GLYNDEBOURNE PRODUCTIONS LTD/ARENAPAL, GETTY

Unboxed

This month's round-up features masterful Beethoven, chamber gems and a powerful tribute

To round off the year, the brilliant Calidore Quartet present ***The Complete Beethoven String Quartets*** *(Signum SIGCD925)*. Following the success of each of their early, middle and late quartet releases – the latter of which won them the BBC Music Magazine Chamber Award in 2024 – this culmination of recordings offers the perfect opportunity to dive deep into the ensemble's compelling interpretations of Beethoven's string works. Not only is this cycle (particularly when listened to in one sitting!) a remarkable achievement, unflinching in ambition and deeply communicative in performance style, the playing is clear and warm throughout – from String Quartet No. 1's opening *Allegro con brio* to the finale of No. 16. The slow movements are performed with sensitivity and expressive nuance, while faster sections showcase precise articulation and impressive technical control.

The Romantic Room: Chamber Works by Spohr *(Pentatone PTC5187505)* is a wonderful six-volume box set from the WDR Sinfonieorchester Chamber Players that brings to life an array of works by the pivotal German composer who lived from 1784 to 1859. Although Spohr was highly regarded during his lifetime – a pioneer in the use of the conductor's baton, a violin virtuoso and the inventor of the chinrest – his name is often overlooked today. As the recording's liner notes state, 'obituaries unanimously hailed him as a guardian of a bygone aesthetic order,' when the news of his death spread. This record works to right that wrong, reviving and showcasing his elegant string quintets, sextets and challenging double quartets that go a long way to show why this composer remains strikingly relevant to this day.

The French pianist Brigitte Engerer (1952-2012) recorded multiple albums for the Harmonia Mundi label throughout her career. This five-CD collection, ***The Harmonia Mundi Years*** *(HMX2904137.41)*, is a deeply rewarding portrait of an artist whose musicality shone in everything she played. The repertoire spans Mussorgsky's *Pictures at an Exhibition*, Beethoven's rondos, bagatelles and Sonata, Op. 110, Schumann's *Kinderszenen* and *Carnaval*, works by Clara Schumann and Liszt, and, of course, Engerer's recordings of Chopin's complete *Nocturnes*. This body of piano works is deeply expressive and filled with technical mastery, a beautiful celebration of the late pianist. ***Miranda Bardsley***

www.classical-music.com

GETTY, ROBIN CLEWLEY, MAT HENNEK, ANDY GOTTS, SATOSHI AOYAGI

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CLASSICAL MUSIC

Audio

Our expert *Chris Haslam* gives advice on buying the latest hi-fi equipment

Headphones to help you listen while you work

Shut yourself away: the Sony WH-1000XM6 headphones block out even the noisiest of colleagues

If you've got a desk job, I'd wager you spend at least some of your time wearing headphones. Whether you work from home or commute into an office, a pair of headphones has become an essential tool for phone calls, video conferencing, enjoying music, or simply to turn the volume down on Debbie and James at the neighbouring desks. Choosing the right pair can make a huge difference to productivity and comfort, especially when long hours are spent wearing them. For most users, modern over-ear wireless designs remain the best option thanks to their mix of sound quality, noise cancellation and wearability.

For me, audio quality is the most important aspect, which is why I've focussed on audio headphones rather than office headsets here. That said, while all the models I recommend here sound great, they also offer practical features for the working environment. Open-backed wired headphones, for instance, are a joy to listen to, but the way they leak sound makes them hugely antisocial.

Topping the wish list for most office workers is a pair of headphones with great Active Noise Cancelling (ANC), which uses microphones and sound processing to counteract outside noise, leaving you with a significantly quieter environment. For office work this is invaluable, reducing the distraction of conversations nearby, not to mention the cacophony of a public transport commute. At home, it can be the difference between staying focused and being distracted by partners, family or housemates. It's worth looking for models with adjustable ANC, and especially something called 'transparency mode' or 'pass-through', which lets outside noise flood in when you need to be aware. The **Sony WH-1000XM6** *(£399; sony.co.uk)* boast the best noise cancelling, and cupping the right ear automatically turns down volume to allow you to listen and interact, while **Bose's QuietComfort** range *(bose.co.uk)* and **Apple's AirPods Max** *(£499; apple.com)* are also brilliant at eliminating distraction.

> Topping the list for most office workers are headphones with great Active Noise Cancelling

The same advanced beamforming (ie focusing sound in a specific direction) microphones used with ANC can also isolate and amplify your voice, helping make call quality brilliantly clear. If your job requires a lot of time on the phone, the professionalism of these mics can be impressive, but if you make calls with noise cancelling on, just be aware that you might not realise how loudly you're talking. These mics also eliminate background noise during calls, invaluable if you're in a noisy office or working from cafés or pubs.

It is not recommended to wear headphones all the time at work, especially in-ear designs, but comfort remains an important feature. Over-ear headphones surround your ears with padded cups that spread pressure evenly. Combine these with lightweight frames –

Open all ears: Shokz OpenComm2 use bone conduction to transmit sound

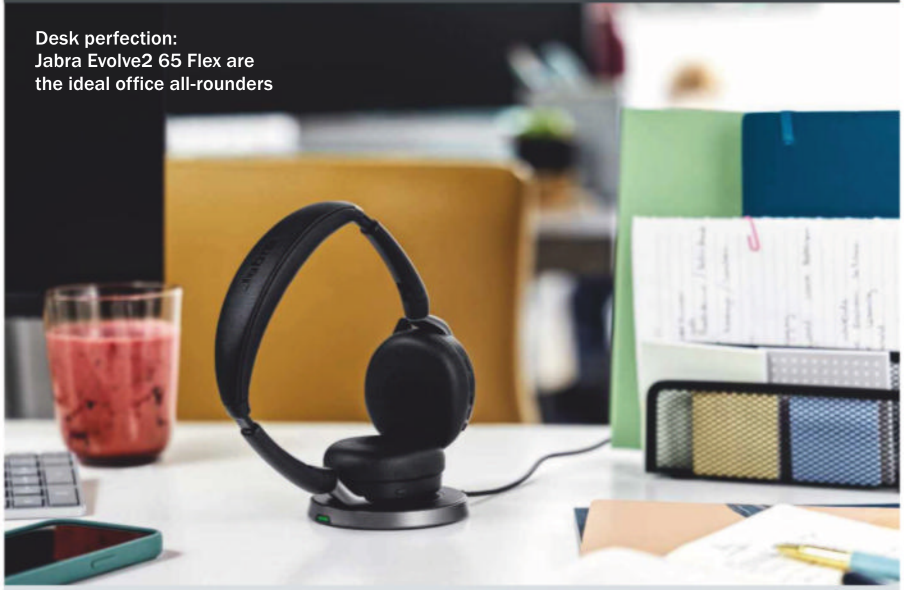
anything under 300g is good – and cushioned, adjustable headbands, and you get a nice customisable fit. Buying headphones online is convenient, but if you plan on wearing them day-in, day-out, I'd recommend a trip to a shop as differences between brands can be enormous. Glasses wearers should definitely test for pressure from the headphones on their frames too.

Wireless connectivity is now the norm, but look out for multipoint Bluetooth pairing, which allows headphones to connect to a laptop and smartphone at the same time – you can join a video meeting on your computer while taking a call on your mobile without disconnecting and reconnecting. Battery life is important, though a good pair of over-ear headphones will offer 20 to 30 hours on a single charge: enough for a full week. Some dedicated work headphones, such as the **Jabra Evolve** series *(jabra.com)*, come with a Bluetooth adapter that plugs into a USB-C port and creates an instant wireless connection.

Finally, I have focussed on larger on- and over-ear headphones rather than true wireless buds. Many of the latest tiny earbuds offer similar office-friendly features, including good call quality, noise cancelling and transparency modes. They are great for commuting and extremely pocketable, but wearing them for long periods can lead to irritation and pressure in the ear canal and, in some cases, can contribute to infections if hygiene is not maintained. This makes them better suited to short meetings, travel or occasional use rather than the whole nine-to-five. And if you want to leave your ears entirely uncluttered, **Shokz OPENCOMM2** *(£159; shokz.com)* use bone conduction instead of standard drivers.

Comfortably numb: Apple's classy AirPods Max offer privacy plus a typically stylish design

We recommend...



Desk perfection: Jabra Evolve2 65 Flex are the ideal office all-rounders

Jabra Evolve2 65 Flex £265

If my diary is clear of meetings or calls, I'll reach for wired open-backed headphones and lose myself in music. When things get busier, though, these on-ear wireless headphones have really impressed me. On-ear designs with ANC are rare, and while not as powerful as the Sony headphones, they do a convincing job of cutting office hum and everyday background noise. A pass-through mode also lets voices and chatter back.

Six microphones keep call quality sharp, supported by a hidden flip-down boom mic that makes speech crystal clear. A tiny USB-C Bluetooth dongle creates an instant, reliable connection, and at just 136g they're wonderfully comfortable. They fold down neatly, and the wireless charging stand means they can sit stylishly on your desk.

All these features go a long way to justifying the price, but importantly, they also sound good, with a lovely inviting tone and plenty of detail. They're not headphones for blasting at full volume, though, so it's just as well you're supposed to be working. **jabra.com**

Sony WH-1000XM6 £400

Having spent a few months with these, it's easy to see why people are happy to pay the high price. Audio quality from the 30mm drivers is exceptional, with crystal clear mids and the tightest bass, and they boast the best noise canceling I've experienced.

There are 12 microphones working hard here and call quality is great, helped by AI-powered voice isolation that means my voice cuts through clearly even in the noisiest environments. It even adjusts automatically if you move from quiet to loud environments. Battery life is epic (30 hours), there's multipoint Bluetooth and the ear pads and headband are comfortable enough for long-haul travel. **sony.co.uk**

EarFun Tune Pro £59.99

You could treat yourself and five coworkers to a pair of these – with change left for biscuits – for the price of the Sonys. And while I feared they would be terrible, they're the best budget ANC headphones I've tried, with better-than-expected audio quality, good hybrid noise cancelling with pass-through for conversations, impressively comfortable ear pads and a whopping 120-hour battery life.

What's more, like the premium designs, there's multiple mics and AI-based software used to filter background noise and boost your voice. Though not up there with the top models, it really works, and call quality was impressive, with no booming but even, consistent voices. There's also an app for tweaking settings, multipoint Bluetooth for greater connectivity options around the office, and a 3.5mm cable is included for better quality audio performance. **myearfun.com**

Budget choice: the EarFun Tune Pro perform well above their lowly price tag

TV&Radio

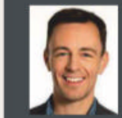
Your guide to what's on BBC Radio 3 this month, plus TV highlights

DECEMBER'S RADIO 3 LISTINGS

Schedules may be subject to alteration. For up-to-date listings see BBC Sounds and iPlayer

Three to look out for

Proud Scot: poet Kenneth Steven explores the traditions of his homeland



Sam Jackson, the controller of BBC Radio 3, selects three programme highlights for the month of December

Hannah Peel's Electronic Women

Composer, broadcaster and producer Hannah Peel and recording engineer Marta Salogni discuss pioneering women in electronic music from Daphne Oram to Laurie Anderson, plus the way their use of sound changed the world.
The Essay, Monday 1 December to Friday 5 December, 9.45pm

The Russia I Lost

Leaving Russia for the last time, BBC journalist Tatyana Movshevich strives to define her Russianness for her children, by reaching back to an unwitnessed past through poetry, music and family narrative, in a rediscovery and a rewriting of her cultural story.
Sunday Feature, Sunday 7 December, 7.15pm

Scotland in Song

Through the stories of three men and two women, poet Kenneth Steven explores Scotland's many musical traditions. From Robert Carver, regarded as Scotland's finest composer of the 16th century, to Hamish MacCunn, composer and conductor born in Greenock on the River Clyde, the series sheds light on some lesser-known Scottish composers.
The Essay, Monday 8 to Friday 12 December, 9.45pm

1 MONDAY

6.30-9.30am Breakfast
9.30am-1pm Essential Classics
1-2pm Live from Wigmore Hall
2-4pm Classical Live
4-5pm Composer of the Week John Rutter
5-7pm In Tune
7-7.30pm Classical Mixtape
7.30-9.45pm Radio 3 In Concert from Barbican, London. Vaughan Williams *Fantasia on a Theme by Thomas Tallis*, Britten *Serenade*, Bliss *Music for Strings*, Delius *Late Swallows*, Elgar *Introduction and Allegro*. Laurence Kilsby (tenor), Chris Parkes (horn), Sinfonia of London/John Wilson
CHOICE 9.45-10pm The Essay Hannah Peel's Electronic Women
10-11.30pm Night Tracks
11.30pm-12.30am 'Round Midnight

2 TUESDAY

6.30-9.30am Breakfast
9.30am-1pm Essential Classics
1-4pm Classical Live
4-5pm Composer of the Week John Rutter
5-7pm In Tune
7-7.30pm Classical Mixtape
7.30-9.45pm Radio 3 In Concert from Glasgow Royal Concert Hall. Antheil *Jazz Symphony*, Gershwin *Piano Concerto in F*, Rachmaninov *Symphony No. 3*. Frank Dupree (piano), RSNO/Patrick Hahn
CHOICE 9.45-10pm The Essay Hannah Peel's Electronic Women
10-11.30pm Night Tracks
11.30pm-12.30am 'Round Midnight

3 WEDNESDAY

6.30-9.30am Breakfast
9.30am-1pm Essential Classics
1-3pm Classical Live
3-4pm Choral Evensong
4-5pm Composer of the Week John Rutter
5-7pm In Tune
7-7.30pm Classical Mixtape
7.30-9.45pm Radio 3 In Concert from Bridgewater Hall, Manchester. Bacewicz *Overture*, Smith *Lost Coast*, Sibelius *Symphony No. 2*. Gabriel Cabezas (cello), BBC Philharmonic/Gemma New
CHOICE 9.45-10pm The Essay Hannah Peel's Electronic Women
10-11.30pm Night Tracks
11.30pm-12.30am 'Round Midnight

4 THURSDAY

6.30-9.30am Breakfast
9.30am-1pm Essential Classics
1-4pm Classical Live
4-5pm Composer of the Week John Rutter
5-7pm In Tune
7-7.30pm Classical Mixtape
7.30-9.45pm Radio 3 In Concert live from City Halls, Glasgow. Witter-Johnson *New Commission*, Grieg *Piano Concerto*, Tippett *A Child of Our Time*. Stephen Hough (pf), Beth Taylor (mez), John Findon (ten), Ashley Riches (bass baritone). BBC SSO/Ryan Wigglesworth
CHOICE 9.45-10pm The Essay Hannah Peel's Electronic Women
10-11.30pm Night Tracks
11.30pm-12.30am 'Round Midnight

5 FRIDAY

6.30-9.30am Breakfast
9.30am-1pm Essential Classics
1-4pm Classical Live
4-5pm Composer of the Week John Rutter
5-7pm In Tune
7-7.30pm Classical Mixtape
7.30-9.45pm Friday Night is Music Night
CHOICE 9.45-10pm The Essay Hannah Peel's Electronic Women
10-11.30pm Late Junction
11.30pm-12.30am 'Round Midnight

6 SATURDAY

6.30-9am Saturday Breakfast

Girl power: Daphne Oram was a pioneer of electronic music

9am-12noon Saturday Morning
12-1pm Earlier... with Jools Holland
1-2pm Music Matters In the Beginning
2-4pm Record Review
4-5pm Sound of Cinema
5-6pm This Classical Life
6-9.30pm Opera on 3 from Metropolitan Opera, New York. Puccini *La bohème*
9.30-10.30pm Music Planet
10.30pm-12.30am New Music

7 SUNDAY

6.30-9am Sunday Breakfast
9am-12pm Sunday Morning
12-1.30pm Private Passions
1.30-3pm Music Map
3-4pm Choral Evensong
4-5pm Jazz Record Requests
5-6pm The Early Music Show
6-7.15pm Words and Music
CHOICE 7.15-8pm Sunday Feature The Russia I Lost
8-9pm Brass Banding

GETTY

9-10pm 20th Century Radicals
10-11.30pm Night Tracks
11.30pm-12.30am Unclassified

8 MONDAY

6.30-9.30am Breakfast
9.30am-1pm Essential Classics
1-2pm Live from Wigmore Hall
2-4pm Classical Live
4-5pm Composer of the Week A Medieval Christmas
5-7pm In Tune
7-7.30pm Classical Mixtape
7.30-9.45pm Radio 3 In Concert from Bridgewater Hall, Manchester. Shostakovich *Festive Overture,* Dvořák *Cello Concerto,* Shostakovich *Symphony No. 10.* Anastasia Kobekina (cello), BBC Philharmonic/John Storgårds
CHOICE 9.45-10pm The Essay Scotland in Song
10-11.30pm Night Tracks
11.30pm-12.30am 'Round Midnight

9 TUESDAY

6.30-9.30am Breakfast
9.30am-1pm Essential Classics
1-4pm Classical Live
4-5pm Composer of the Week A Medieval Christmas
5-7pm In Tune
7-7.30pm Classical Mixtape
7.30-9.45pm Radio 3 In Concert from Prichard-Jones Hall, Bangor. Ida Moberg *Soluppgång,* Huw Watkins *Horn Concerto,* Mozart *Horn Concerto No. 4,* Sibelius *Symphony No. 5.* Ben Goldscheider (horn), BBC NOW/Ryan Bancroft
CHOICE 9.45-10pm The Essay Scotland in Song
10-11.30pm Night Tracks
11.30pm-12.30am 'Round Midnight

10 WEDNESDAY

6.30-9.30am Breakfast
9.30am-1pm Essential Classics
1-3pm Classical Live
3-4pm Choral Evensong
4-5pm Composer of the Week A Medieval Christmas
5-7pm In Tune
7-7.30pm Classical Mixtape
7.30-9.45pm Radio 3 In Concert live from Symphony Hall, Birmingham. Strauss *Death and Transfiguration; Oboe Concerto; Also Sprach Zarathustra.* Jonathan Kelly (oboe), CBSO/Kazuki Yamada
CHOICE 9.45-10pm The Essay Scotland in Song
10-11.30pm Night Tracks
11.30pm-12.30am 'Round Midnight

11 THURSDAY

6.30-9.30am Breakfast
9.30am-1pm Essential Classics
1-4pm Classical Live
4-5pm Composer of the Week A Medieval Christmas
5-7pm In Tune
7-7.30pm Classical Mixtape
7.30-9.45pm Radio 3 In Concert live from City Halls, Glasgow. Elsa Barraine *Symphony No. 2,* Maurice Ohana *Piano Concerto,* Ravel *Valses nobles et sentimentales,* Debussy *Nocturnes.* Nicolas Hodges (pf), BBC SSO/Ilan Volkov
CHOICE 9.45-10pm The Essay Scotland in Song
10-11.30pm Night Tracks
11.30pm-12.30am 'Round Midnight

12 FRIDAY

6.30-9.30am Breakfast
9.30am-1pm Essential Classics
1-4pm Classical Live
4-5pm Composer of the Week A Medieval Christmas
5-7pm In Tune
7-7.30pm Classical Mixtape
7.30-9.45pm Friday Night is Music Night
CHOICE 9.45-10pm The Essay Scotland in Song
10-11.30pm Late Junction
11.30pm-12.30am 'Round Midnight

13 SATURDAY

6.30-9am Saturday Breakfast
9am-12noon Saturday Morning
12-1pm Earlier... with Jools Holland
1-2pm Music Matters In the Beginning
2-4pm Record Review
4-5pm Sound of Cinema
5-6pm This Classical Life
6-9.30pm Opera on 3
9.30-10.30pm Music Planet
10.30pm-12.30am New Music

14 SUNDAY

6.30-9am Sunday Breakfast
9am-12pm Sunday Morning
12-3pm EBU Christmas Across Europe
3-4pm Choral Evensong
4-10pm EBU Christmas Across Europe
10-11.30pm Night Tracks
11.30pm-12.30am Unclassified

15 MONDAY

6.30-9.30am Breakfast
9.30am-1pm Essential Classics
1-2pm Live from Wigmore Hall
2-4pm Classical Live
4-5pm Composer of the Week Prokofiev
5-7pm In Tune
7-7.30pm Classical Mixtape
7.30-9.45pm Radio 3 In Concert from Barbican, London. Tchaikovsky *Symphony No. 4,* Vaughan Williams *Flos Campi; Dona Nobis Pacem.* Antoine Tamestit (viola), LSO & Chorus/Antonio Pappano
9.45-10pm The Essay Accompanying Austen
10-11.30pm Night Tracks
11.30pm-12.30am 'Round Midnight

16 TUESDAY

6.30-9.30am Breakfast
9.30am-1pm Essential Classics
1-4pm Classical Live
4-5pm Composer of the Week Prokofiev
5-7pm In Tune
7-7.30pm The Classical Mixtape
7.30-9.45pm Radio 3 In Concert from Glasshouse, Gateshead. Ortiz *Clara,* Chopin *Piano Concerto No. 2,* Beethoven *Symphony No. 5.* Boris Giltburg (piano), Royal Northern Sinfonia/Nil Venditti
9.45-10pm The Essay Accompanying Austen
10-11.30pm Night Tracks
11.30pm-12.30am 'Round Midnight

December TV&Radio

Hearts aflutter: Sanguen Lee and Gareth Haw in *Swan Lake*

LAURENT LIOTARDO

TV CHOICE
Swan Lake

Experience Tchaikovsky's magnificent *Swan Lake* like you've never seen it before, as the English National Ballet presents a revival of Derek Deane's one-of-a-kind 1997 production. Deane's *Swan Lake* is choreographed in the round, specifically for the Royal Albert Hall, but this filmed version brings a whole new level of enjoyment, featuring 360-degree views and never-before-seen aerial angles, showing off the intricacy of his geometry.

With more than 100 dancers, including 60 swans shimmering in unison, the ensemble work is certainly impressive – dancers report that the vast staging requires much greater stamina than other productions. And yet the romance between the leads, Prince Siegfried (Gareth Haw) and the Swan Queen Odette (Sangeun Lee), is just as mesmerising and cuts straight to the very heart of Tchaikovsky's classic score, played sensitively by the English National Ballet Philharmonic.

BBC iPlayer, available now

17 WEDNESDAY

6.30-9.30am Breakfast
9.30am-1pm Essential Classics
1-3pm Classical Live
3-4pm Choral Evensong
4-5pm CotW Prokofiev
5-7pm In Tune
7-7.30pm Classical Mixtape
7.30-9.45pm Radio 3 In Concert from Hoddinott Hall, Cardiff. Works by Grieg, Nielsen, Tchaikovsky. Elizaveta Ivanova (flute), BBC NOW/Jaime Martín
9.45-10pm The Essay Accompanying Austen
10-11.30pm Night Tracks
11.30pm-12.30am 'Round Midnight

18 THURSDAY

6.30-9.30am Breakfast
9.30am-1pm Essential Classics
1-4pm Classical Live
4-5pm Composer of the Week Prokofiev
5-7pm In Tune
7-7.30pm Classical Mixtape
7.30-9.45pm Radio 3 In Concert from Saffron Hall, Saffron Walden. Bach *Christmas Oratorio*. Polyphony, Britten Sinfonia/Stephen Layton
9.45-10pm The Essay Accompanying Austen
10-11.30pm Night Tracks
11.30pm-12.30am 'Round Midnight

19 FRIDAY

6.30-9.30am Breakfast
9.30am-1pm Essential Classics
1-4pm Classical Live
4-5pm CotW Prokofiev
5-7pm In Tune
7-7.30pm Classical Mixtape
7.30-9.45pm Friday Night is Music Night
9.45-10pm The Essay Accompanying Austen
10-11.30pm Late Junction
11.30pm-12.30am 'Round Midnight

20 SATURDAY

6.30-9am Saturday Breakfast
9am-12noon Saturday Morning
12-1pm Earlier... with Jools Holland
1-2pm Music Matters In the Beginning
2-4pm Record Review
4-5pm Sound of Cinema
5-6pm This Classical Life
6-9.30pm Opera on 3
9.30-10.30pm Music Planet
10.30pm-12.30am New Music

21 SUNDAY

6.30-9am Sunday Breakfast
9am-12pm Sunday Morning
12-1.30pm Private Passions
1.30-3pm Music Map
3-4pm Choral Evensong
4-5pm Jazz Record Requests
5-6pm The Early Music Show
6-7.15pm Words and Music
7.15-8pm Sunday Feature One Singular Sensation
8-9pm Brass Banding
9-10pm 20th Century Radicals
10-11.30pm Night Tracks
11.30pm-12.30am Unclassified

22 MONDAY

6.30-9.30am Breakfast
9.30am-1pm Essential Classics
1-2pm Live from Wigmore Hall
2-4pm Classical Live
4-5pm CotW Georgian Christmas
5-7pm In Tune Christmas Special
7-7.30pm Classical Mixtape
7.30-9.45pm Radio 3 In Concert from St Martin-in-the-Fields, London. Handel *Messiah*. Monteverdi Choir, English Baroque Soloists/ Rousset
9.45-10pm The Essay Three Christmas Stories
10-11.30pm Night Tracks
11.30pm-12.30am 'Round Midnight

23 TUESDAY

6.30-9.30am Breakfast
9.30am-1pm Essential Classics
1-4pm Classical Live
4-5pm CotW Georgian Christmas
5-7pm In Tune at Christmas
7-7.30pm Classical Mixtape
7.30-9.45pm Radio 3 In Concert from Milton Court. A Christmas Odyssey. Adrian Scarborough, BBC Singers
9.45-10pm The Essay Three Christmas Stories
10-11.30pm Night Tracks
11.30pm-12.30am 'Round Midnight

24 WEDNESDAY

6.30-9.30am Breakfast
9.30am-1pm Essential Classics
1-3pm Classical Live
3-4pm Choral Evensong
4-5pm CotW Georgian Christmas
5-7pm In Tune at Christmas
7-7.30pm Classical Mixtape
7.30-9.45pm Radio 3 In Concert A Christmas Concert
9.45-10pm The Essay Three Christmas Stories
10-11.30pm Night Tracks
11.30pm-12.30am 'Round Midnight

25 THURSDAY

6.30-9.30am Breakfast
9.30am-1pm Christmas with Petroc Trelawny
1-3pm A Festival of Nine Lessons and Carols
3-4pm TBC
4-5pm CotW Georgian Christmas
5-6.15pm In Tune
6.15-8.15pm Proms repeat
8.15-10pm Radio 3 In Concert. MacMillan *Christmas Oratorio*. Rhian Lois (sop), Roderick Williams (bar), BBC SO & Chorus/ James MacMillan
10-11.30pm Night Tracks
11.30pm-12.30am 'Round Midnight

26 FRIDAY

6.30-9.30am Breakfast
9.30am-1pm Essential Classics
1-4pm Classical Live
4-5pm CotW Georgian Christmas
5-7pm In Tune
7-7.30pm Classical Mixtape
7.30-10pm The Essay Gershwin and Miss Swift
10-11.30pm Late Junction
11.30pm-12.30am 'Round Midnight

27 SATURDAY

6.30-9am Saturday Breakfast
9am-12noon Saturday Morning
12noon-1pm Earlier... with Jools Holland
1-2pm Music Matters In the Beginning
2-4pm Record Review
4-5pm Sound of Cinema
5-6pm This Classical Life
6-9.30pm Opera on 3
9.30-10.30pm Music Planet
10.30pm-12.30am New Music

28 SUNDAY

6.30-9am Sunday Breakfast
9am-12pm Sunday Morning
12-1.30pm Private Passions
1.30-3pm Music Map
3-4pm Choral Evensong
4-5pm Jazz Record Requests
5-6pm The Early Music Show
6-7.15pm Words and Music
7.15-8pm Sunday Feature Wolf Biermann
8-9pm Brass Banding
9-10pm 20th Century Radicals
10-11.30pm Night Tracks
11.30pm-12.30am Unclassified

29 MONDAY

6.30-9.30am Breakfast
9.30am-1pm Essential Classics
1-2pm Live from Wigmore Hall
2-4pm Classical Live
4-5pm Composer of the Week
5-6.15pm Words and Music
6.15-7.30pm New Gen Artists
7.30-9.15pm Proms repeat
9.15-10pm Lebrecht Interview
10-11.30pm Night Tracks
11.30pm-12.30am 'Round Midnight

30 TUESDAY

6.30-9.30am Breakfast
9.30am-1pm Essential Classics
1-4pm Classical Live
4-5pm Composer of the Week
5-6.15pm Words and Music
6.15-7.30pm New Gen Artists
7.30-9.15pm Proms repeat
9.15-10pm Lebrecht Interview
10-11.30pm Night Tracks
11.30pm-12.30am 'Round Midnight

31 WEDNESDAY

6.30-9.30am Breakfast
9.30am-1pm Essential Classics
1-3pm Classical Live
3-4pm Choral Evensong
4-5pm Composer of the Week
5-6.15pm Words and Music
6.15-7pm New Gen Artists
7-10pm Last Night of the Proms
10-11.30pm Night Tracks
11.30pm-12.30am 'Round Midnight

QUIZ ANSWERS from p 104

1. Puccini's *La bohème*
2. Schubert's *Winterreise*
3. Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky
4. Jean Sibelius
5. Peter Maxwell Davies
6. Henry Purcell
7. 'Winter' from Vivaldi's *The Four Seasons*
8. Norway
9. Barack Obama's presidential inauguration
10. Janáček's *Jenůfa* (her stepmother was to blame)

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THE QUIZ

Celebrate the winter season with our frosty quiz...

1. The tenor aria 'Your tiny hand is frozen' is sung in Act I of which 1896 opera?

2. 'Gefror'ne Tränen' (Frozen Tears) is a song from which chilly song cycle, composed in 1827?

3. Whose Symphony No. 1 has the subtitle 'Winter Dreams'?

4. The third movement of whose Violin Concerto was described by musicologist Donald Tovey as 'a polonaise for polar bears'?

5. Whose Symphony No. 8 'Antarctic' was commissioned by the British Antarctic Survey to celebrate the 50th anniversary of Vaughan Williams's *Sinfonia Antartica*?

6. Though the story is probably exaggerated, which composer is said to have died of hypothermia on the night of 21 November 1695 when his wife locked him out of the house?

7. Possibly written by the composer himself, the sonnet beginning 'Agghiacciato tremar trà nevi algenti' ('To tremble from cold in the icy snow') was published in the 1720s to accompany which work?

8. The world's most northernmost professional orchestra, the Arctic Philharmonic is based in which country?

9. At which event on 9 January 2009 did violinist Itzhak Perlman, cellist Yo-Yo Ma, pianist Gabriela Montero and clarinettist Anthony McGill have to mime a performance, as it was too cold to play their instruments without damaging them?

10. In which 1904 opera does the ice melting in spring horrifyingly reveal the body of the title character's baby, who was murdered over the winter?

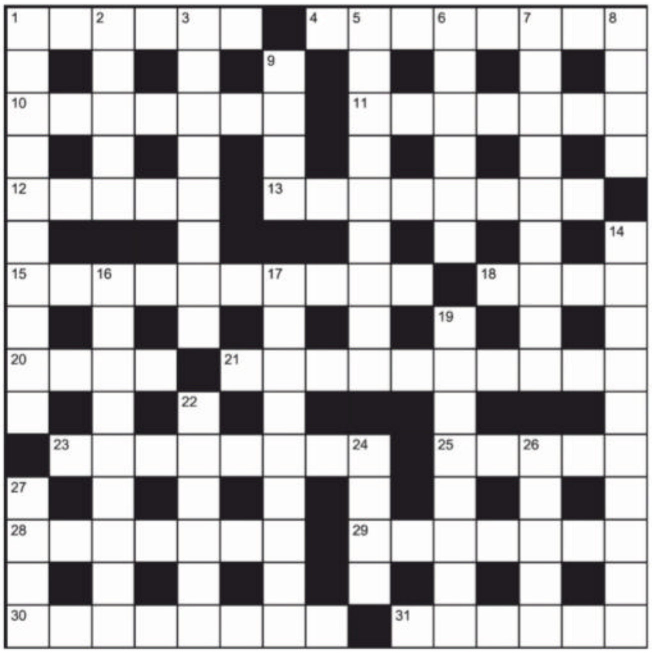
See p102 for answers

The *BBC Music Magazine* PRIZE CROSSWORD NO. 418

Crossword set by **Paul Henderson**

B C
usic
MAGAZI

The first correct solution of our crossword picked at random will win an exclusive **BBC Music Magazine Coffee Mug** (not available to purchase). To enter, send answers to: *BBC Music Magazine*, Crossword 418/ Dec 2025, PO Box 501, Leicester, LE94 0AA to arrive by 27 November 2025 (solution in February 2026 issue).



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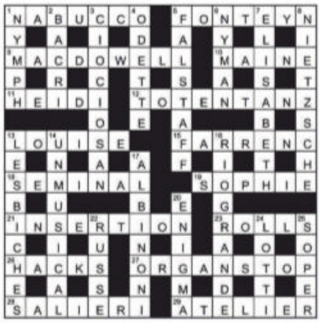
SEPTEMBER SOLUTION
No. 415



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H	E	I	D	I	■	T	O	T	E	N	T	A	N	Z
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E	■	N	■	A	■	A	■	F	■	I	■	T	■	H
S	E	M	I	N	A	L	■	■	S	O	P	H	I	E
B	■	U	■	■	■	B	■	E	■	G	■	■	■	■
I	N	S	E	R	T	I	O	N	■	R	O	L	L	S
C	■	I	■	U	■	N	■	I	■	A	■	O	■	O
H	A	C	K	S	■	O	R	G	A	N	S	T	O	P
E	■	A	■	S	■	N	■	M	■	D	■	T	■	E
S	A	L	I	E	R	I	■	A	T	E	L	I	E	R

SEPTEMBER WINNER

John Harper, Deal

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ACROSS

1 Old bass and soprano cornered by academic British composer (6)
4 American composer distressed by whingers? (8)
10 Austrian opera with Australian – variable openings in Essen, Cologne and Karlsruhe (7)
11 British composer wrong to buttonhole politician in this way (7)
12 Concealed difficulty in fugal song (5)
13 Sad boy receiving nothing in MP3? (8)
15 Exposure I'd arranged for Stravinsky work (7,3)
18 Some musical legend recalled – Fitzgerald? (4)
20 Universal silence after section drops out? That's unacceptable (2-2)
21 One from Paris using strings to capture piece of Ravel not yet on disc (10)
23 Group of singers having great fun with golfing accessory (4,4)
25 The sound of The Police heard in thicket? (5)
28 A male inclined to collar one regarding restful music (7)
29/30 Composer whose work didn't always go without a Hitch? (7,8)
31 A lot of chill for us: a source of inspiration for Bliss (6)

DOWN

1 Early singers shun a crowd if upset (4,6)
2 French composer having business, and in Paris (5)
3 Excessively promote prodigy ultimately – prove he can play (8)
5 Unexpectedly we see her debut in Lulu in another place (9)
6 Here's me, first to laugh, coming in to watch Handel opera (6)
7 Was initially sick and felt bad, but sang carols? (9)
8 A couple of numbers from Italian composer (4)
9 Soprano's thoughtful, overlooking new slip (4)
14 Glenn Miller, say, prohibited songs on the radio (10)
16 End of piece? Get large whisky at pub (6,3)
17 US composer not upset after shorter recording? (9)
19 Piece for soloist working with sure winner in company (8)
22 Vaguely muted about end of fine choral piece (2,4)
24 Small but grand 26 bass kept in recess (4)
26 Father never accommodating one keyboard instrument (5)
27 Composer's disgusted comment about contralto (4)

Please note: Because of *BBC Music Magazine*'s limited office access, there may be a delay in receiving your prize. We apologise for any inconvenience caused.

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Music director Christopher Gray talks to *Ashutosh Khandekar* about preserving and refreshing 350 years of Cambridge choral tradition

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PLUS! *Michael White* talks to musical children of ***high-profile musicians***; *Harriet Constable* tells the story of the ***Ospedale della Pietà***, where Vivaldi made his name; we reveal the ***Christmas music*** we could gladly do without; and *Jo Talbot* explores Tchaikovsky's ***Swan Lake***

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Music that changed me

Ute Lemper

Singer and actress

Ute Lemper has performed on stage and screen over a 40-year career – in musicals and plays on Broadway, in Paris and Berlin, and in London's West End. She has recorded more than 30 albums, and is particularly known for her interpretations of Berlin cabaret songs, the works of Kurt Weill and Bertolt Brecht, and the songs of Marlene Dietrich, Édith Piaf, Nino Rota and Astor Piazzolla, as well as her own compositions. In December she presents her 'Rendezvous With Marlene' show in Paris, before touring Europe and America in 2026.

I grew up in a small town called Münster in West Germany during the Cold War. There was a lot of music in our house, which helped me to find freedom in quite restrained, bourgeoisie surroundings. My father had a great jazz collection of LPs – Gershwin, Cole Porter, Ella Fitzgerald and Louis Armstrong. He played the piano and could work out how to play any song you asked for. He was a funny guy and should have been an entertainer instead of a banker. My mum was a soprano and pianist, and liked opera and operetta. I was the wild kid in the family; I didn't like to obey the rules, and I had so much fire and passion but didn't know where to put it! So I started studying ballet and modern dance, and once I was 12, I started to sing.

As I teenager I loved all the great music of the 1970s, from Stevie Wonder to Al Jarreau, Joan Armatrading and Joni Mitchell. Plus, my brother introduced me to Pink Floyd and Dire Straits. I wasn't yet into theatrical music, but I did like **BARBRA STREISAND**. I loved her very first album, including 'A Sleepin' Bee' and 'Who's Afraid of the Big Bad Wolf?' I also really loved the music of *Funny Girl*. I liked the way she sang – long, beautiful arcs of vocal interpretation, like threads in a tapestry. It was very inspiring to me, and soon enough I was singing in a jazz band. Münster might have been a small town, but it did have a music university, so there were many musicians around; they were in their 20s and students, and I was 14 and hanging out with the big guys, doing bad things, but making good music!

GETTY

> 'Art needs to do more than entertain you; it needs to wake you up, to disturb you'

After studying at the Max Reinhardt Seminar in Vienna and being hired for the first German-speaking cast of *Cats*, I went to Berlin in 1985, and here I had a wake-up call. I was living in a divided city: West Berlin, surrounded by a wall in the middle of East Germany. The situation was so drastic, so disturbing, a Cold War reality in this ugly, still partly destroyed Berlin. I thought, 'Art needs to do more than entertain you, or sing a love song; it needs to make you wake up, shake you, disturb you and make you go home thinking you need to do something with your life.' That's when I started singing **KURT WEILL**; I was also starring in a big musical theatre production of *Peter Pan*, but I was writing my first Kurt-Weill/Bertolt Brecht evening, and onwards it went.

I moved to Paris and starred as Sally Bowles in the Parisian production of *Cabaret* in 1987. People in the papers were calling me the new **MARLENE DIETRICH** and I thought, 'My god, I'm just starting out; don't compare me to this amazing legend!' So, I sent her a letter, and she called me! She lived as a recluse and hadn't left her house on Avenue Montaigne in more than 15 years, but it turns out she had read all the papers and had heard about me, this young German making a career in Paris. We had a three-hour conversation; very revealing, very powerful. I was too young to really understand the depth of it, but 30 years later I made a show out of it called 'Rendezvous With Marlene'. I sing her songs, and it's a big theatrical evening: tragic, romantic, funny, entertaining.

I had been singing songs that were given to me, so I thought I'd like to try composing an album myself. I had already started writing music and I knew I could do it, but I just needed space to put together the puzzle of composing and writing words. My partner had a music studio in Chelsea, and in 2001 I said, 'I have a couple of songs; I want to mix some demos and record them.' My songs are not from the theatrical universe, but are much more inspired by **JONI MITCHELL**. There are elements of jazz, groove and R&B... these are the chords I write on the piano, the ones that touch my heart and soul. I bring it all together with words, and I love to improvise melodies. My album *Time Traveller* (2023) was important, because it was autobiographical; I had written lyrics about ageing, how wonderful it is to grow, evolve and get older. After years of pressure, of being on Broadway night after night and trying to balance that with being a mother to four children, I looked around and found myself in a zone of acceptance and peace, and happiness also.

Interview by Michael Beek

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Fri 12 Dec Folk

A Winter Union

Sat 13 Dec Classical

Christmas with the Jess Gillam Ensemble

Sun 14 Dec Classical

Orchestra of the Age of Enlightenment
Bach, the Universe & Everything – Christmas Cantata

Mon 15 Dec Folk

The Albion Christmas Band

Thu 18 Dec Jazz

Funky Soulful Christmas
Mwenso and the Shakes

18 – 20 Dec Variety

Nine Lessons and Carols for Curious People
Robin Ince

Sat 20 Dec Folk

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Music of the Fallen

Sat 31 Jan

Colin Currie Quartet
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Matilda Lloyd & Goldmund Quartet
An Intimate Music Salon

Thu 12 Feb

Neave Trio
Musical Remembrances

Fri 13 Feb

Neave Trio
Piazzolla: Four Seasons of Buenos Aires

Fri 20 Feb

Brodsky Quartet & Sir Willard White

Sat 14 Mar

Solem Quartet & Alice Zawadzki
Different Trains

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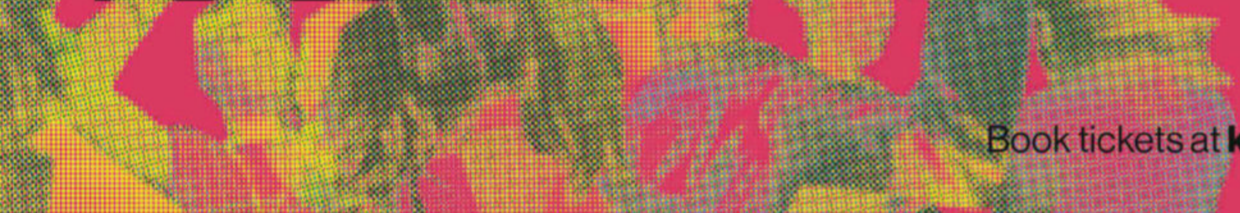

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